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Silly hats and big bucks

Window on Jordan

By Claire Younger
Star Staff Writer

I ADMIT to being a touch sensitive about my waistline, but if you really want to insult me, call me a tourist. "Tourist." The word conjures up grizzly images of overweight, blundering, ignorant hordes who descend on a foreign country, observe its historic wonders, make plenty of daff remarks, usually make at least one major cultural faux-pas, then leave just as quickly as they arrived.

In Amman, the mass construction of interna-

tional hotel chains appears to signal a serious tourist takeover. Or does it? Well, for argument's sake, let's say it does. Like it or not, these alien culture vultures are actually doing the country a favor—a big favor known as revenue!

The Ministry of Tourism surprisingly doesn't have too much to say on the matter, but it is 'transparent' to most people, especially those who have had the good fortune to don silly hats and sunglasses and go out and visit any of Jordan's 6000 archaeological sites, that we are living in a potential tourism gold mine.

Archaeology, the cornerstone of the Kingdom's

tourist potential, presents some unique problems. You simply can't have thousands of unruly visitors stampeding all over your heritage for the sake of a few dinars. You can, however, 'manage' tourism effectively and find solutions so that most people benefit from the industry. It is particularly important that local communities gain from what is often a major disruption to their way of life.

'Tourism management' is actually quite trendy these days. Most countries are realizing

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The Star

Jordan's political, economic and cultural weekly

Le Jourdain
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AMMAN, 27 AUGUST — 2 SEPT. 1998, VOLUME 9, NUMBER 12, 350 FILS

أسبوعية سياسية مستقلة

Lower House deputies angry about the way cabinet was formed

By Itisam Awadat
Star Staff Writer

IT IS customary to give all new governments a 100 days grace period—to settle into the role of managing the nation's affairs—before analyzing their progress and performance. However, as soon as the list of new ministers was announced, many critics expressed amazement and despair. "We wanted to see some new faces, not the same old characters," bemoaned one deputy at the Lower House.

The 83rd government to be appointed in Jordan, headed by Dr Favez Al Tarawneh, reinstated 12 ministers from the previous government of Dr Abdel Salam Al Majali, as well as four senators from the Upper House.

Even the way the new government was formed, created resentment from some quarters. Deputies at the Lower House expressed their anger at the way their council was ignored during the formation process.

"The Government has shown preferential treatment to the Upper House, and has ignored the Lower House entirely," said Mahmoud Al Kharrabsheh, spokesman for the parliamentary National Guidance Committee (NGC).

Deputies first learned about the new cabinet from the television. "We don't want to be appointed as ministers, but we ask to be treated in the same manner as the senators," Kharrabsheh continued.

Other members of the legislature criticized the mechanism of appointing ministers. "All ministerial appointments should be made with the interests of the public in mind. They should not be handed out as rewards to people," said Nazih Ammarin, an opposition dep-



uty. "The leading positions in the country are being monopolized by a small group of influential people," said Ammarin, adding, "if the new government intends to be successful, it has to tackle the

Letter of Designation listed the priorities which the new cabinet must take into consideration. They included establishing greater transparency, accuracy and objectivity when dealing with cases of national interest, fighting nepotism, and eradicating poverty.

In response to the letter, the government promised to carry out all the Royal directives. This drew a rueful comment from Ammarin, who said, "To be honest, I do not trust any Jordanian government; we will just have to wait and see if they are true to their word."

Rumors are also rife that the new Government headed by Dr Al Tarawneh—former Chief of the Royal Court and a leading member of the Jordanian delegation that negotiated with Israel in 1991—maybe planning to intensify contact with Israel. This provoked further anguish from one deputy, who said, "What we really need at this period of time is to further our relations with other Arab countries, our brothers. Can we really trust the Israeli government?"

Moving away from those in legislature, what is the current opinion of the new government from the man in the street?

One Ammanite, entering a supermarket in a quest for bottled drinking water, commented, "I think, generally, the Jordanian people are pessimistic; they do not see the recent reshuffle as having any effect on their lives. What I care about the most is ending the contaminated water crisis, and reducing the price of bread. Here I am, buying bottled drinking water for the 12 members of my family. Can this new government do any worse?"



Jordanian Islamist opposition leader Hamza Mansour shouts slogans against US President Bill Clinton during a rally in support of Sudan in Amman, 24 August. The United States attacked the Sudanese pharmaceutical plant on 20 August, saying it was involved in chemical weapons production and had links with Saudi exile Osama Ben Laden.

Israel agrees to turn over 13 percent of West Bank land

By Rebecca Trounson

OCCUPIED JERUSALEM—New hope on the peace front was registered this week as Israel said Monday it has agreed in principle to turn over another 13 percent of the West Bank to the Palestinians, the figure specified in a month-old US peace initiative. Israeli and Palestinian leaders very quickly sat down at the negotiating table. However, analysts say it is still early days, and that there is still a long way to go.

The government of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, which had said it could not accept the 13 percent figure without endangering Israeli security, has told US mediators that Israel is now prepared to withdraw from that amount of land, if other conditions are met, an Israeli spokesman said.

"What's left is for the Palestinians to finalize their security obligations," said David Bar-Ilan, a senior aide to Netanyahu.

Israel continues to insist that three percent of the territory to be turned over be designated a "nature reserve," with limits on Palestinian construction for an interim period, but has dropped a demand that the land remain permanently under Israeli security control.

"There's an agreement that the three percent would become part of an eventual Palestinian state," another source close to the negotiations said Monday. "It's an opening for progress."

All the land to be relinquished by Israel in the next phase of withdrawal would, under terms of existing agreements, be designated either Category A, under full Palestinian security and civil author-

ity, or Category B, under Israeli security control and Palestinian civil authority. The expectation on both sides is that the land in either classification could be included in a future Palestinian state, although Israel has not yet agreed to the creation of such an entity.

The US initiative, which President Clinton presented to the parties in January, has not been officially announced, but details of it are widely known. The proposal calls on Israel to withdraw in three stages over a 12-week period from 13 percent more of the West Bank. In exchange, the Palestinians would give Israel a detailed plan for combating terrorism and take other measures. The Palestinians have publicly accepted the proposals but Israel has not.

The Palestinians now have full or partial control over 27 percent of the West Bank.

At the same time, Netanyahu's office on Monday denied reports that he had dropped a demand that the Palestine National Council convene to cancel clauses in the Palestinian charter, or covenant, that call for the destruction of Israel. The Palestinians say they have already canceled the relevant clauses, but Netanyahu has made the issue a key tenet of his administration's peace policy.

Even so, there were signs of flexibility on the contentious issue. "The charter is not an issue that has to be completed before there's an agreement, but before the withdrawal itself can be implemented," Bar-Ilan said.

Meanwhile, in Oslo, the Norwegian capital, Palestinian Authority President Yasser

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The decade to be named later

By Martin Miller

IT'S 2003. After three cataclysmic years of pestilence, earthquakes, hurricanes, fires, tsunamis and plagues of locusts, the planet is a horrible eyesore. But every dark cloud has its silver lining as two survivors, workers in a time-honored and expanding field, discover.

Man No. 1: These are boom times for the gravedigger.

Man No. 2: Sure beats being a deck jockey.

Man No. 1: In the 1990s we'd have been unemployed, but here in the ... the, uh ... the, this particular decade, we've got it made.

From a '90s vantage point, you can easily see the problem. For that matter, you can see the trouble just as well from an '80s, '70s or '60s perspective. What exactly is the term for the first decade of the next millennium?

"Well, there doesn't appear to be any such name for it," said Ruth Freitag, of the Library of Congress, who has compiled a massive bibliography of millennium publications. "And I've seen manuscripts dealing with the millennium dating back to the 17th century."

Fans of "The X-Files" maintain there's a perfectly obvious explanation for the omission. Quite simply, the shadow government has squelched the development of the word. After all, what's the point of developing a first-decade word when the world is going to blow up the millisecond that 2000 arrives?

But for those less given to apocalyptic visions, and they are apparently in the minority, the vocabulary void exists for entirely comprehensible reasons that have nothing to do with deadly goo, a government conspiracy or bug-eyed aliens.

Until the mid-1950s, the notion of 'dividing time into neat, 10-year blocks seemed absurdly arbitrary. What benefit was there in measuring time with such a blunt instrument when historical trends never cooperated? Major events such as Reconstruction, the Gilded Age, World War II and so on either fell well short of filling out their decades or ran on far past them.

Of course, there were the Roaring '20s, so named for America's freewheeling attitudes toward booze, jazz and the stock market. The decade, however, didn't obtain its 'roar' until decades later, when historians wanted to highlight its stark contrast with the '30s, best known in retrospect for the Great Depression and the Dust Bowl.

"I don't think people in the '20s thought of themselves as living in the '20s," said Fred Foggo, a professor of American popular culture at Westminster College in Utah. "People just didn't think that way then."

But by the mid-to late '50s, the rapid changes of modern life overtook the nation's ability fully to understand them as they happened. During this time, the once-agrarian nation witnessed, among other things, the dawn of rock 'n' roll, the Space Age and the civil rights movement.

Bringing them all home as quickly as they

occurred was the brand new and incredibly powerful medium of television. As Americans watched these vivid images unfold on their small screens, there arose a growing need to make sense of the noise and chaos, say cultural historians. One way was to break up the fearful blur of years into manageable chapters.

"If you're afraid of the future, naming it gives you symbolic control over it," says Stephen D. O'Leary, a millennial scholar at the University of Southern California. "It's really all about control."

Subsequent decades unleashed their own torrent of technological, social and political transformations, and further fueled a demand for order. The acceleration of change too led to an explosive growth in the media, which painstakingly document in words and images the ordinary to the extraordinary. The end result fostered a hyper-self-awareness, cultural historians say.

"In the old days, we named the decades after the fact. Then, we started naming the decades as we lived them," says O'Leary. "Now, we have to anticipate the experience by naming them before they even get here."

Despite the pressures, the English language is still without a word for the next decade. (It's also without one for the decade beginning in 2011. Calling them the teens leaves out the first couple of years.) Not surprisingly, the past is of little help.

One of the few historical references to the problem dates to a class of college freshmen in

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US strikes receive mixed response from international community

By Tala Abu Taha
Special to The Star

FOLLOWING ORDERS from President Clinton on Thursday 20 August, the US Armed Forces attacked sites in Afghanistan and Sudan in response to information gathered by American intelligence identifying Ben Laden's group as responsible for the US embassy bombings in Nairobi and Dar es Salaam. Six sites in Afghanistan were also pounded by American cruise missiles as retaliation for sheltering Ben Laden following the Sudan bombings. Taliban officials said Ben Laden survived the attack but 21 were killed and 30 were injured.

In the Sudanese capital Khartoum the attack heavily damaged the Al Shifa pharmaceuticals factory. According to the US government, the factory was producing chemicals that could be used to make deadly VX nerve gas.

Sudanese officials have condemned the attack on the fac-



A view from inside Al Shifa factory before it was bombed

tory and have denied they are producing chemical weapons in their country. Sudanese President Omar El Bashir warned that his country reserves the right to respond to the US attack using all necessary measures and has called for an emergency meeting of the UN Security Council to discuss the US attack. He also invited the UN to send a delegation to Sudan to investigate the plant for proof of

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Fayez Al Tarawneh Man of the hour

By Ali Saadeh
Special to The Star

IN LESS than a year and a half, he made three summersaults. These were made rapidly but with method. For in March of last year, now former Prime Minister, Dr. Abdel Salam Al Majali handed him the foreign portfolio. And in February of this year, he became Chief of the Royal Court. Such an eminent position is a sure way to become prime minister. Despite exceptions to this rule—there have been just four prime ministers in the last 20 years who have not held the post of Royal Court Chief—Fayez Al Tarawneh, was groomed right from his very early days. Today he has reached the pinnacle of political life, becoming Prime Minister.

However, people in the know point out that most of the posts Dr. Tarawneh has held have not allowed him to show his distinct abilities. He was not allowed, for instance, to display his leadership potential, perhaps because his political life and personal interest revolved around economics.

The Karak-born Prime Minister obtained an economics degree from the University of Jordan. Later on, he obtained his masters and doctorate from the University of Southern California. However, it was in 1971 that he began his working life as deputy chief of protocol.

In the mid-70s he went on to complete his higher education in the USA, returning to the country in 1980. It was then that he became an economic secre-

tary in the Prime Ministry, staying in his post till early 1983.

Dr. Tarawneh's political life kicked off in January that year when then Prime Minister Zaid Al Rifai made him Minister of State for Prime Ministry Affairs.

He moved on again in December 1983 when he became Minister of Supply. This was to prove a fateful step, because the country was going through an acute economic crisis. The government was held responsible and subsequently resigned.

The young economist then tried his hand in the private sector. However, two years later he was back in government, joining the Jordanian delegation in the peace negotiations.

From then on, was at the helm of diplomacy, first as advisor to the Jordanian side of the multilateral peace talks, and then as Jordan's Ambassador to the United States. This was a post he held from 1992 to early 1997.

In Washington, Dr. Tarawneh gained a thorough understanding of the centers of power in the US Congress and was able to exert some influence on the American administration's understanding of the Middle East.

Commentators note that while the new Prime Minister has extensive experience in foreign relations; he is not as experienced in domestic matters. He needs, for example, to establish closer relations with the different political trends in the country. A number of pressing local issues are on the new Prime Minister's table which need to be resolved quickly. ■

Israel agrees to turn over 13 percent of West Bank land

Arafat said the latest proposal could be a beginning step toward reviving the peace negotiations. But the mistrust built up during 17 months of deadlock also was on display as Arafat accused Netanyahu of policies that have damaged the five-year-old peace process and engendered "despair, hate and violence," he said.

Arafat was in Oslo to commemorate the anniversary of secret Norwegian-mediated talks that led to the historic 1993 peace agreement signed on the White House lawn. Netanyahu, who inherited the Oslo accords from his predecessors, did not attend the ceremony but sent a representative.

Arafat was scheduled to meet Monday evening with US mediator Dennis B. Ross, who also attended the commemoration.

tion in Oslo. Israeli and American officials said Ross could decide to fly to the Middle East from Norway if there appeared to be a chance that another round of mediated talks could produce a breakthrough.

All sides cautioned, however, that many obstacles remain in the path to an accord. There is still no agreement, for example, on other aspects of the American initiative, including Israel's insistence that the Palestinians provide a concrete plan for cracking down on extremist groups that operate inside Palestinian-controlled territory and the Palestinian demand for a halt in the expansion of Jewish settlements on occupied lands. ■

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News Service

US strikes receive mixed response from international community

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chemical weapon production. International reaction to the strikes varied. Security General of the UN Kofi Annan said that he was only informed about the attacks minutes before the strikes occurred. China issued a cautious re-

sponse which neither supported nor condemned the attack. Israel welcomed the US decision to strike, as did the British.

Russian President Boris Yeltsin condemned the US action. Pakistan denounced the strikes on neighboring Afghanistan and on Sudan. The Arab League condemned the strikes, denouncing any type of terrorist act, but no individual Arab country denounced the strike bluntness except for Iraq and Libya. ■

For the Record

Jordan and Egypt cooperate AMMAN (Petra)—Officials from the Civil Aviation Authority from both Jordan and Egypt will hold a bilateral meeting in Amman next month to discuss possibilities of linking tourist sites in both countries with regular and casual flights. Director General of Royal Wings, Abid Qantar, said Mr. Qantar pointed out that both sides seek to operate daily flights between Amman, Sharm Al Sheikh and Aqaba, and four weekly flights between Amman and Cairo to encourage tourism and the movement of businessmen between the two countries. Regarding the Amman-Lamaca route, he said that aviation officials from Jordan and Cyprus will hold a meeting on 8 September, to discuss possibilities of operating four regular flights a week for Royal Wings on this route.

Minister of Information statement

AMMAN (Petra)—Minister of Information Naser Judeh reiterated on Tuesday the fixed stand on Jordanian foreign relations. "We consider our Arab relations as a priority," Judeh said, during a meeting with reporters this week. "Jordan welcomes any agreement between the Palestinian National Authority and Israel, but the government wants to be sure regarding the contradictory information about the second stage of Israeli withdrawal from 13 percent of the West Bank," the minister said. Concerning what happened in Sudan, Judeh said that "Jordan rejects terrorism, and is against those who commit terrorism since innocents pay the price of violence and counter violence. Jordan is for dialogue between Sudan and USA, because Jordan believes in dialogue as a means to tackle disputes," Judeh said. Concerning the Lockerbie issue, the minister pointed out that His Majesty King Hussein called on the American President, the Minister of Defence, and President of the Congress to solve this issue.

Jordanian Scientific Week

AMMAN (Petra)—Under the patronage and upon directives of His Royal Highness Crown Prince Hassan, the Regent, who is also the President of the Higher Council for Science and Technology, the Sixth Jordanian Scientific Week will open on 1 September, under the "Strategy of Human Resources Development." Muntaser Al Masri, president of the National Center for Human Resources Development (NCHRD) and the Head of the Fair's Steering Committee said participants will discuss the draft plan for a national strategy on human resource development, which was compiled by a team of specialists from the NCHRD and the Royal Scientific Society (RSS). Speaking at a press conference, Masri said a group of specialists and experts from the private and public sectors, as well as from some regional and international organizations will be taking part in the week's activities, to finalize and approve the strategy.

The decade to be named later

Continued from page 1

1896. Their bright idea was to decree that the first decade of the 20th century should be known as the "Naughty Naughts," according to Freitag.

Somehow, millennium observers doubt the idea will catch on 100 years later.

The vexing question was recently the subject of an informal Internet chat, says O'Leary, who noted the following offerings: the Two Thousands, the Twenty Ohs, the Oh-Ohs, the Double Ohs, the Zeros, the Aughts, the Oughts and the Oughths.

"A name will crop up," maintains Fogo, who has writ-

ten several books about popular culture. "We're talking about it already. My money is on the folks at Time magazine and Newsweek."

Like the decades of the late 20th century, a nickname for the next decade probably will stem from a character trait of its time—whether real or perceived. Will it be selfish enough to be another Me Decade such as the '70s? Or as greedy as the '80s? Or as full of bull (the stock market, the NBA, the White House) as the '90s?

While far from a consensus, some millennium watchers predict a potentially surprising trend for a time period soothsayers will be consumed by

disaster and catastrophe. These observers predict it could be a time of hope.

"Once we get past the millennial year, a lot of fear is going to be alleviated," O'Leary says. "The cycle of cynicism that's dominated for so many years could fade away and it could be replaced by a new wave of idealism."

Naturally, others hardly believe the next decade will be remembered as the Idealistic '00s. While concurring that this decade in America has been one of unparalleled disillusionment, Virginia Tech professor Marshall Fishwick believes the next one may be worse.

"I think we are in for some

rude shocks," said Fishwick, who is tabulating a pop-culture scoreboard for the century. "Every great empire makes the bad mistake of believing it can run the world. We're already vastly overextended around the globe, and I see some real setbacks in terms of American wealth and prestige."

Whatever the millennium brings, whether peace and harmony or unremitting pain and misery, shouldn't it be the hope of every citizen of the world that that annoying Prince song never be played again? ■

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The Star
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Silly hats and big bucks

Continued from page 1

the importance of managing the flow and impact of the ubiquitous bus boards that come, see, (though hopefully stop short at conquering) their nations.

Failure to contain these ice-cream guzzling, photomaniacs could be calamitous. Mind you, failure to give them what they want may mean courting economic disaster. Stephen Spielberg would be able to make a disaster film about it. Imagine... Amman, 2000. A ghost town of high rise hotels, lonely pianists singing to bars full of no one, soups overflowing with unpurchased carpets—a real tear-jerker!

But wipe away those tears—official statistics tell us that things are still rosy! There has been a two percent increase in the number of tourists coming to the Kingdom so far this year. Travel

agents too seem happy enough but keep stressing that more must be done to market the Kingdom as a tourist destination overseas. Marketing is wonderful. It can mean so many things to so many people. But it is really much more simple than that.

Remember, tourists are a fussy lot. The question the industry should really be asking is "are we giving them what they want?" Four hundred Gulf tourists who turned round at the border recently because they thought there wasn't any clean drinking water in the country clearly didn't think so. Yes, you could argue that that was a one-off situation, but the bottom line is that infrastructure and amenities are key factors in the development of a successful tourist industry.

Then there is service. These foreign fops want to take a drink in the shade,

in a certain standard of establishment without feeling they are being ripped off. Yes, yes, of course they are being ripped off—even they know that! The trick is to create the sensation that everything is being done above board. However wonderful a country is, excessive profiteering and dishonesty do not incline the average tourist to return.

While major issues such as future water provision and quality accommodation are being addressed, smaller details—such as providing a few more seats at some sites—could easily be implemented at minimum expense.

Clearing up the donkey poop around Petra, for example, was a real winner! You can bet your bottom dollar that these little touches will mean as much to Elmer and Jolene, or Ugha and Hamideh, as the magnificence of the Siq itself. Sad, but true! ■

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ARAB BANK PLC Given New Rating

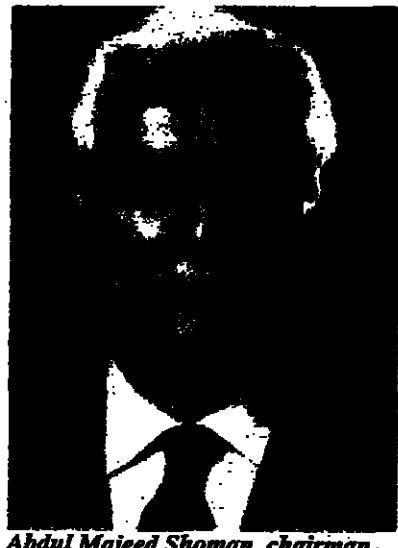
Senior Debt: assigned AA-
Short-Term: assigned TBW-1
Issuer : assigned B

Thomson BankWatch is pleased to announce the assignment of new ratings for Arab Bank PLC. The rating exercise for Arab Bank was indeed unique as the legal structure of the bank is unlike anything previously seen, even when compared to developed markets. While typically it is unusual to split a rating as such, the very nature of the legal structure of Arab Bank necessitates such an action.

Arab Bank PLC can lay claim to one of the longest and decidedly the most distinguished histories of any bank in the Middle East region. The bank's origin pre-dates World War II and has continued on during periods of regional turmoil and strife that would have severely tested and destroyed the resolve of many institutions not just regionally but globally. If similar circumstances were applied. During all of these periods, the bank has not just weathered each crisis, but in every case benefited and emerged even stronger.

Arab Bank can be described in at least two ways. The first way, the bank is clearly a survivor. The second way is that the bank's own name can be a misnomer, especially from risk profile perspective. While the bank is headquartered in Amman Jordan, the overall country risk profile resembles some of the best banks domiciled in both Western Europe and the United States. The bank brings with it, a long history and a philosophy that its customers are indeed "first and most important." It is this philosophy that has created the bank that exists today and that can lay claim to be a peer bank when compared to some of the best banks in the world. This philosophy has also moved Arab Bank into being one of the only true "right to quality" banks in the Middle East.

Arab Bank is diversified over a broad geography where operations comprising



Abdul Majeed Shoman, chairman
of the Arab Bank Group

more than 80% of consolidated activities are conducted outside of Jordan.

The unique capital structure enables the bank ratings to be considered independent of any sovereign rating for the country in which the Arab Bank is headquartered. Further there are sufficient legal precedents and opinions which indicate that any potential extrajurisdictional seizure of Arab Bank external assets by local regulatory authorities is highly unlikely and not valid under most if not all legal jurisdictions. Accordingly, as the vast majority of Tier 1 capital, and assets are outside of Jordan thereby greatly diminishing the element of transfer risk and as a hard currency (US Dollar) is the functional currency for Arab Bank. Thomson BankWatch employs the global ratings scale for the Arab Bank rating.

Asset quality is extremely solid given the history of expertise cultivated and applied to lending. Additionally, a con-

servative level of loan loss reserves is maintained to fully cover non-performing loans. The tenor of the loan portfolio is quite short with 80% scheduled to mature within one year as of YK97. Total loans for Arab Bank typically represent less than 50% of assets.

The stability of earnings is enhanced by the conservative asset/liability management as well as the leading strategy and geographic diversification. Also supporting the sound financial position is a healthy capital base with the BIS Tier 1 ratio exceeding 12% and shareholders' equity to assets of nearly 9%.

Arab Bank is well established and dynamic, as demonstrated in its sound performance and impressive perseverance. Management has planned for any potential disruption in the Arab Region by building capital in its branches. In some of the world's major financial centers. Even in the unlikely event of a regional difficulty affecting more than Jordan, Arab Bank has more than sufficient asset liquidity to repay all foreign currency obligations. As Arab Bank has several sizable subsidiaries, affiliates, and an extensive network of international branches, the bulk of consolidated equity is housed outside of Jordan. Management has coordinated the broad geography of banking operations through the hubs in Amman, London and Geneva.

The underlying strategy has been a focus on serving Arab communities worldwide, particularly through trade finance both on and off of the balance sheet. Credit quality is solid, as are loan loss reserves and capital. Management prefers to maintain a high degree of liquidity mainly in conservative inter-bank placements and government securities. Consequently, returns have been modestly lower than those of diversified international banks. Management's successful and well developed strategy provides the foundation for the continued sound expansion of operations. ■

هكمان النهرى

JORDAN

W E E K



An unconventional
report on Jordanian
news and views edited
by Marwan Al Asmar

Bread for the people!

■ Surprise, surprise. One of the first things that the government could be doing is to lower the prices of bread, in line with the falling international wheat prices. According to press reports this is likely to happen when Prime Minister Fayez Al Tarawneh returns from Washington where he is meeting His Majesty King Hussein.

Curse

■ Unemployment is the curse of all evils. You can bet your life that everybody goes through it at one time or another. And it affects all professions, especially the ones you would least likely expect to find. In that respect, a latest study concerning unemployment amongst doctors was particularly revealing. Conducted by Jordan's Medical Association it found that between 10 to 15 percent of young doctors experience unemployment in the first four years after graduation. The study suggested that the percentage of unemployment of this group is between five to eight percent in any one of those initial years. Further it suggested that "over-employment" in private clinics reaches as high as 20 percent. And doctors are not as rich as is commonly believed. Doctors who can be categorized in the high income bracket is no more than five percent of the total physicians in this country. The study showed that this was due to number of factors: the high rate of medical students, and the Gulf War which meant that quite a lot of the doctors practiced in the Gulf, and Kuwait, especially, came home.

Get your water

■ At last the mineral water imported from Saudi Arabia is hitting the market in full swing. Having completely checked it to make sure that it meets the required standard, the Ministry of Supply has now fixed the price of a bottle of 1.5 liters at 300 fils. The Ministry has even fixed the price rate for shopkeepers. They can buy from Ministry warehouses at Jowdeh. Each carton, which contains 12 x 1.5 liter bottles, will cost them JD 3,120 fils. The Ministry says that the merchant or shopkeeper can sell the carton to the consumer at JD 3,600 fils. However, the merchants can't buy more than 50 cartons a day to sell to the consumers. Also, the import of mineral water from Syria—a total of 400,000 liters—is being sold through Civil Consumer Cooperatives in the country. But there are people still who are balking up the prices, which consumers can't do anything about. Meanwhile, and in a bid to secure water supply to Amman, Iran expressed its willingness to finance the project for transporting water from Al Disi reservoir to the capital.

US Embassy

■ The American Embassy in Amman has received a bomb scare alert earlier this week. The police searched the embassy after it received an anonymous call that there was a bomb in the embassy compound. This turned out to be a false alarm. Last week the embassy received another warning.

Voluntary society closures spark community concern

By Ibtisam Awadat
Star Staff Writer

VOLUNTARY SOCIETIES

in Jordan have provided a vital support role to thousands of needy people in Jordanian society since the 1930s. Today, with eleven percent of Jordan's population living in absolute poverty, and 26 percent in absolute poverty, the government's recent action to close down some of these much needed voluntary organizations has sparked concern from local communities.

Rebhi Qatoom, director of the research center at the General Union of Voluntary Societies (GUVS), traced the history of Jordan's voluntary sector and explained how it has adapted to changing needs.

"The huge influx of Palestinian refugees following the Arab-Israeli war in 1948 led to a sudden increase in homelessness, poverty and unemployment. At the beginning of the 1950s, more societies were founded, specializing in providing assistance and financial aid to the elderly, the homeless and to orphans."

Qatoom continued, "The '80s saw a change in the concept of voluntary and charitable affairs with the introduction of the National Comprehensive Plan for Development. Instead of being just fund organizations, the voluntary societies moved towards productive projects in



Orphans—one of the many groups which benefit from work of voluntary societies

all fields such as agriculture, cattle and goat breeding, weaving, clothing and others." Nowadays, according to Qatoom, no less than 400,000 people benefit from these projects every year. So why have steps been taken to close down some of these societies?

Dr Mohammad Kheir Mamer, Minister of Social Development (MSD) stressed first

of all that the ministry plans on the theoretical basis that the percentage of absolute poverty is 30%.

Concerning the recent society closures he added, "Twelve voluntary societies which the ministry closed had failed to meet the purpose they were established for." He added, "We found out that some of the societies were using 80 percent of their budget as salaries for the employees while the rest is left to charitable contributions."

Needy people, however, are more concerned with the lack of adequate services offered by some of these societies, and some are disillusioned by the way they are run.

One old man who had hoped for assistance from his local voluntary society for his handicapped son commented,

"When the society declared that more services would be made available to the handicapped in the area many were very optimistic. Our hopes faded, however, as we realized that the aim of its members is just to take salaries and misuse funds."

The head of this small voluntary society denied these accusations but refused to say anything in its defence.

Prince stresses civil defence priorities

AMMAN (Petra)—His Royal Highness Crown Prince Hassan, the Regent, chaired a meeting at the Royal Court, Tuesday, to discuss the Civil Defense Dept's spending priorities for the coming year. The meeting—part of preliminary meetings, aimed at identifying the state's expenditure priorities prior to drafting the 1999 General Budget Plan—was attended by the responsible cabinet ministers, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Field Marshal Abdul Hafez Meri Ka'abneh, and Directors of the Departments of Public Security, General Intelligence and Civil Defense.

In previous meetings, the spending priorities of the Armed Forces and the Public Security Department were reviewed. The Regent stressed the important role undertaken by the Civil Defense personnel, noting their efforts to protect people's lives and properties.

Crown Prince Hassan said tackling spending priorities and the needs of the Civil Defense Department means discussing the needs of the society and the economic sector in this country. This is because Civil Defense affects society, both economically and socially. The Regent stressed the importance of education, focusing on the quality of performance and work productivity of the civil defense cadres.

Director of the Civil Defense Dept., Brigadier Theeb Ma'ani, gave a briefing on the department's duties and expenditure priorities. He said the responsibilities of his department were increasing in the light of economic development, population growth and new construction activities. The Regent stressed that the 1999 State Budget will be worked out on the basis of a scientific, practical and objective study of spending priorities.



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"She hates me... She hates me not... She hates me..."

Our Say...

America's folly

AS THINGS stand today, we may never know for sure if Al Shifa Pharmaceuticals Factory—which now lies in ruins in the suburbs of Khartoum—was involved in dubious activities, such as producing or developing deadly chemical agents. What we do know for sure, is that the factory—financed and supported by legitimate African money and international bodies—did produce much needed anti-biotic and animal vaccines.

When US Cruise missiles leveled the plant early this week, Washington told a stunned world that it had physical evidence that chemical agents were being manufactured there. The US attack, which also hammered a number of sites in Afghanistan (dubbed as "terrorist training camps" by American officials), came in the wake of the terrorist bombings in Nairobi and Dar Es-Salaam. The Cruise missile attacks were aimed at undermining the infrastructure of Saudi-born Osama Bin Laden, who the US now considers as prime suspect in the embassy bombings.

Yet, at the time of writing, Washington has failed to produce convincing evidence that ties Bin Laden to the embassy bombings, and the Khartoum factory to chemical weapons. There is evidence linking Bin Laden to Al Shifa plant, either. It is always Washington's word that we must believe, and it is always Washington's actions that must be accepted, without questioning.

American foreign policy has not been popular with the Arab and Muslim worlds for understandable reasons. Bombing a pharmaceuticals factory in Khartoum adds to our indignation and disgust at such a policy. Starving millions of Iraqi children is the ultimate manifestation of such a policy. International norms, laws, conventions, treaties and others have been made redundant by this latest and blatant US action.

Again we ask, where is that incriminating evidence? And if such evidence existed, was America's rash and irresponsible response justified? President Clinton, reeling from a personal crisis at home—that has already tarnished his presidency and may bring its early demise—needed to deflect public attention from the Monicaagate scandal. With no evidence to put forward, and his own credibility at stake, why should anyone believe his claims about the Khartoum plant and even Bin Laden's complicity?

The simple truth is that the United States has broken the law and is itself a renegade. In our eyes it is no different from terrorists who bomb innocent civilians and "soft targets" to pursue their own political or personal crusades. Mrs Albright called it the war of the future, a war where Washington treats the world as its own to bomb and terrorize.

Mr Clinton's plan to deflect attention will not work, and the US may pay a heavy price for this latest folly.



Palestinian President Yasser Arafat, Norwegian Foreign Minister Knut Vollebæk and former Israeli Prime Minister Shimon Peres give a news conference in Oslo 24 August. Arafat is Oslo to "celebrate" the fifth anniversary of the Oslo-agreement.

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Jordan's political, economic and cultural weekly

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Will Mr Scandal bombard my house too?

By Jihad Abdullah

PRESIDENT CLINTON has the right to a private life, regardless of whether it is decent or not! But what he doesn't have the right to is to let his own private problems be the direct cause for killing people and damaging their property. This is not a political statement aimed at condemning the US attack on the Sudanese Shifa factory, but a logical conclusion that every observer of recent events will agree with.

The recent raids—especially the one over Sudan—were totally unjustified. Clinton said they were in response to the recent events in Kenya and Tanzania, but how can these acts be justified when the FBI chief in Nairobi said, only 24 hours after the raid, that the investigation were far from being complete! So it wasn't the investigations. There doesn't seem to be any political motives either. Do you think that the recent Lewinsky scandal had anything to do with it?

The president's decision seems to be another attempt to distract public opinion away from his "improper relationship." His decision lacks justification, as the Sudanese bombing raid shows. The Shifa factory was in fact a pharmaceutical factory, and it is nonsense to say it was used to produce the VX gas. If this was a VX plant, then bombing it without warning, without removing innocent civilians from the factory's perimeter, is an even greater crime. As we all know, VX is a gas and any dam-



age to its containers (through an attack for example) would enable this highly dangerous nerve gas to disperse into the surrounding environment, killing every living creature in its path. Fortunately, this didn't happen, because there was no dangerous gases there! But if the gas was there, and

we believed in what Clinton said, then what was the president's real target: the factory or the civilians?

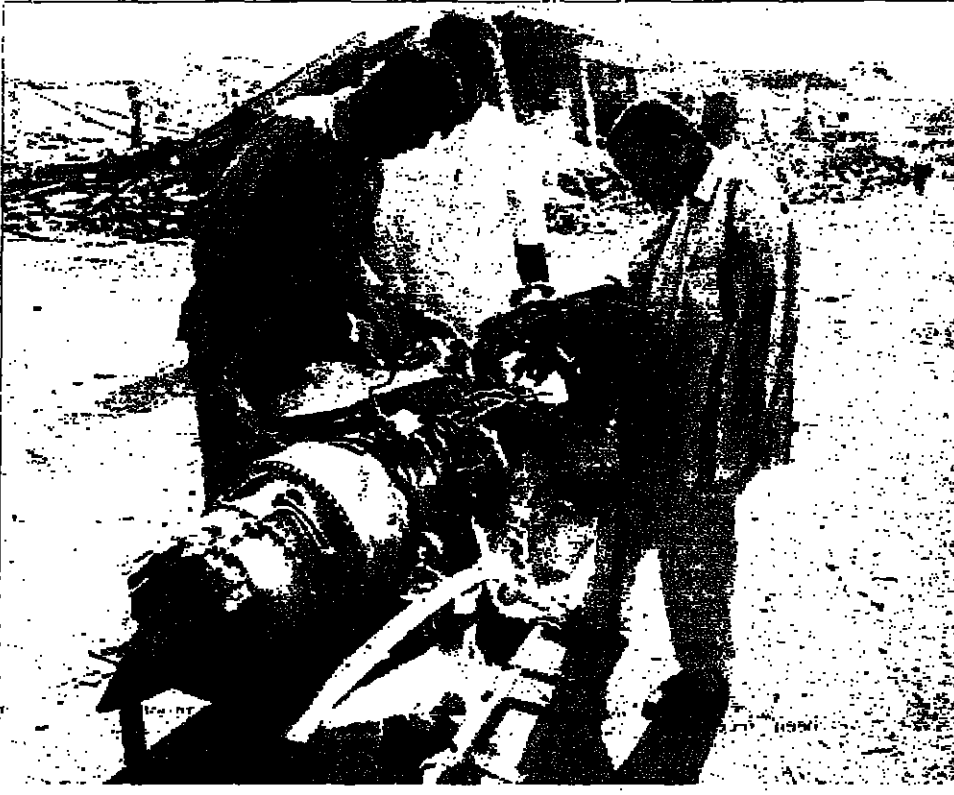
Moreover, I can see an economic equation in the attack on Sudan. Before the raid, Sudanese officials claimed many times that they had been warned by US officials to reduce their annual production of wheat; it was not to exceed their annual needs. The United States is fighting an economic war against the whole world. Sudan, Libya, Iraq and Nigeria can testify to this. Libya faced the wrath of the US after the opening of an artificial river, providing irrigation to a vast area of land, which threatened US wheat exports to Africa, both in price and quality. The American administration decided to interfere with this; it had nothing to do with a Pan Am airplane.

Does racism come into the equation as well? According to a recent report issued by the US Department of State, the majority of attacks against American interests over the last few years occurred in North and South America, and in Europe (i.e. outside the Middle East and Africa). Most were committed by non-Arab, non-Muslim individuals. The ongoing war against the region least responsible for attacking the US, is driven by the American media's idea that every Muslim, or Arab, is a possible terrorist. Don't forget either, that quite a few of these so-called terrorist groups were once sponsored and supported by American aid. The Taliban is one example of how your friend one day can be your enemy the next.

A lot of the problem lies with the US's unique definition of terrorism! It confuses between actual terrorism (we agree that the Nairobi and Dar As Salaam embassy bombings were terrorist acts) and a nation's right to self-defense and self-determination. The Palestinian revolution (including the Hamas attacks) is a good example of how motives can be confused, but it is not the only one!

Under what terrorism label does Israel's actions over the last 60 years come under? Some analysts refer to "acceptable terrorism." This particular type of terrorism is often financed by the American taxpayer! American presidents should realize that such support inevitably taints the American citizen, who is considered as a willing partner in the aggression. This explains why the US embassy was attacked in Beirut, and not the Canadian Embassy for example—Lebanon was attacked and bombed by "Israel's" planes and tanks, paid for by the American taxpayer. A strange logic, isn't it?

We all know that the reasons given by terrorists for their actions are often muddled, but this applies equally to those who fight terrorism as well. In both cases, the victims are always the innocent people.



A group of Sudanese men inspect the remains of what is believed to be a missile, 24 August, at the site of a pharmaceutical factory in Khartoum. The United States attacked the plant on 20 August, saying it was involved in chemical weapons production and had links with Osama Bin Laden, accused of being behind the bombings of US embassies in Kenya and Tanzania.

Who are the real terrorists?

By John Pilger

By knowingly killing innocent people, for political ends, President Clinton is a terrorist. By supporting his action, the Prime Minister and the Defence Secretary are accomplices. The dictionary meaning of terrorism allows no other interpretation; the rest is wilful obfuscation, or propaganda. What matters now is our informed reaction.

We have been through this many times before, with the lies echoed predictably from Downing Street. In 1986, there was the "evil" Colonel Gaddafi, whose country President Reagan bombed from bases in Britain, killing mostly women and children, including Gaddafi's 16-month-old daughter.

In 1990, there was the "evil" General Noriega, said to be a dangerous drugs trafficker, whose capture by US Marines required a full-scale invasion of his country and the death by bombing of at least 2,000 Panamanians, mainly the poorest of the poor in their barrios. Noriega and drugs had precious little to do with it. The aim was to put Panama, its canal and its US base under direct American sovereignty, managed by other Noriegas.

In the same year, there was "the truly evil" Saddam Hussein, another one of Bush's and Reagan's old pals, whose regime they had armed and backed (along with Margaret Thatcher, who sent most of her cabinet to Baghdad as supplicants or arms salesmen). Saddam's use of American and British weapons in his attack on the "evil" multitudes in Iran in 1980 was perfectly acceptable. A million people died in that "forgotten" war; and the American and British arms industries never looked back.

Alas, Saddam, the nominal victor, then attacked the wrong country, Kuwait. He was clearly unreliable: "an uppity bastard," as one State Department briefcase described him more in sorrow than anger. Punishing the uppity bastard cost as many as 200,000 Iraqi lives, according to a study by the Medical Educational Trust. These were ordinary Iraqis who died during and immediately after a period of military and economic carnage whose true scale has never been appreciated outside the Middle East. This old fashioned colonial massacre

was called the Gulf war. The dead included thousands of Kurdish and Shi'a people who were Saddam's bitter opponents and whom Bush had called upon to rise up against their oppressor. Long after it was over, New York's *Newsday* revealed, from official sources, that three brigades of the US 1st Mechanised Infantry Division—"The Big Red One"—had used snowploughs mounted on tanks to bury alive Iraqi conscripts in more than 70 miles of trenches. A brigade commander said, "For all I know, we could have killed thousands."

This is a war crime. The following year, Bush attacked Somalia in what was called a "humanitarian intervention." He was in the midst of his re-election campaign. Bush said the Marines were doing "God's work, saving thousands of innocents." Like his moralising over the Gulf war, this was generally accepted by the British media, with honourable exceptions.

American television crews were waiting as the Marines landed in a beautiful African pre-dawn: "prime time" at home. From the Somali side there was perpetual darkness; "chaos" and "tribalism" and "warlords." When the American warlords had completed their adventure in Somalia and taken the media home with them, the story died, as we say. According to CIA estimates, the Marines had left between 7,000 and 10,000 Somalis dead. This was not news.

Soon after he was elected in 1992, Clinton attacked Baghdad with 23 Cruise missiles. These destroyed a residential area, killing, once again, mostly women and children, including Iraq's most distinguished artist, Leila Al Attar.

Interviewed on his way to church with his wife, Clinton said, "I feel quite good about this, and I think the American people feel quite good about it." The pretext for the attack was an Iraqi "plot" to kill George Bush on a visit to Kuwait. There was no hard evidence and the plot story is now widely regarded as fake.

Two years ago, Clinton attacked Iraq again, this time insisting that he was "defending" Kurds against Saddam Hussein, who "must pay the price." Once again civilians—television's unpeople, I call

them—paid the price.

Earlier this year, Clinton very nearly attacked again. Virtually the same footage of missiles looking sleek against the dawn, light, courtesy of the Pentagon, appeared on British television. What stopped him?

Like spontaneous combustion, public opinion all over the world raised its voice. The cameras had also shown glimpses of Iraq's silent holocaust, the consequences of the imposition of "economic sanctions" by the United States and Britain (under the usual UN flag of convenience) against the Iraqi civilian population, notably its children.

Tony Blair said he wept for the children who were killed in Omagh by a terrorist act; but he is silent on the children who die in Iraq as a result of one of the most enduring terrorist acts of the late 20th century, conducted largely by his government and its principal ally.

According to the Food and Agricultural Organization and the World Health Organization, both UN agencies, more than half a million children have died as a direct result of sanctions. Other sources put the figure at over a million. Baby food and enriched powdered milk are blocked, along with vital hospital equipment: stethoscopes, X-ray machines, medical swabs, scanners and water-purifiers.

As for the news of Clinton's latest attack, the surreal stereotypes are back on parade: the flag burning, embassy storming, bearded, wild men of Islam—"the enemy of the future," says Washington. Forget that not only have Muslims been responsible for a tiny proportion of deaths caused by terrorism, but in recent years it is they who have been the greatest sufferers from state terrorism. The limbs found lying in the rubble in Khartoum and Afghanistan are theirs: the terrible burns shown fleetingly on TV are theirs.

All, of course, are unpeople: the victims of an unerring pattern of ruthless, lawless terrorism. Imperialist by nature and infinitely greater than that of any Islamic or Irish group. It is time to stop sniggering at the distractions of this rampant power and to recognize the truth about it and to speak out.

The Independent

Middle East Beat by Khairi Janbek Raining missiles

JUST AS the title indicates, it was literally raining missiles over Sudan and Afghanistan. The *casus belli* for the US cruise attack, is the recent terrorist action against USA diplomatic representations in Africa. Just as the terrorists have picked up rather soft targets for their attacks, the USA has also responded in kind. After all, Sudan is in the midst of a devastating civil war, and Afghanistan...well, is in a rather fluid situation.

The core of the matter remains to be Osama Bin Laden, who is increasingly making Carlos the Jackal look like a harmless Easter Bunny. It is worth noting that the US, even at the time of the previous administration, alluded to the alleged presence of Bin Laden terrorist training camps in Sudan, and often spoke about his connections in Afghanistan.

But it was left to the current administration to take action. Obviously there are many difficulties, moral, political, and legal when considering the American action which doesn't seem to be bothering the USA. Some of the combatants in the Sudanese strife have actually welcomed the attack on Khartoum, while in Kabul, the Taliban forces have given clear indications that they will restrain Bin Laden's future activities.

What the USA was seeking is results. And from the recent indications, they seem to have got the results they want. Also the message is clear to other countries in the world, but only those who tend to be without much international sympathy, to be careful of their benefactors, because terrorism tends to be the poor nations' spur weapon.

Of course, and as expected there was an uproar against the American action in the Islamic world, but most of these countries are either dependent on American goodwill for their future well-being, or are already outcasts in the eyes of the USA. It is not the vocal protests that can be worrying to the USA, but rather the possibility of a new cycle of violence which will end up consuming many victims.

No one doubts the impact of American firepower, but equally, no one doubts the effect of a zealous and committed terrorist to wreak havoc when striking. Clearly, the US aims at hitting any target that may pose as a possible base or infrastructure for terrorism, making the reluctant or volunteer host to think twice before they give refuge or support to any terrorist organization. Sanctions do not have the deterrence value anymore but rockets do make a bigger bang. Antipathy towards the US government does not seem to raise very high in the administration's opinion, as recent history demonstrated when Mrs Albright phoned Mr Arafat after the missile attack to reflect about the state of peace in the region.

It is Islam and Muslims that we should be talking about and despite the fact that president Clinton emphatically declared that the attack was not against Islam, it is hoped that the Muslim community in the Diaspora—the USA, and the West will not suffer the prejudice that emerges in various societies in times of trouble. The actions of a small minority that interprets faith in its own way does not reflect the views of the majority of Muslims whom are raised on the benevolent and merciful those of Islam.

The question remains, whether irrationality can be fought with the same arguments of irrationality. Is it feasible that the only way to combat irrationality is by using the same methods which brought it out in the first place? It is not the freedom fighter or the terrorist definition that matters at the end of the day, but rather what can be construed as rational, or irrational.

Business scene

■ The economic and industrial sectors last week lost one of the most prominent figures. Mustafa Darweesh Al Khalili passed away Thursday, leaving a strong record of assistance to local economic and business sectors. Well known for his patronage of the reputable industrial complex LG. Al Khalili spent about a quarter of a century introducing the latest technology to the Jordanian market.

■ So far, the number of participants in the upcoming conference of Jordanian businessmen and investors has reached 400. More than 218 are from Jordan, 26 from United Arab Emirates, 17 from Saudi Arabia, 54 from Palestine, nine from Qatar, three from Lebanon, four from Egypt, two from Yemen, six from Spain, four from Germany, seven from America, and others. The conference which is due to be held on 17 September, is the first of its kind in the Kingdom and is aimed at promoting investment in the country.

■ The Bank of Jordan has registered gross profits of JD 1,964 in the first six months of the year. Compared with just JD 405.2 thousand in the same time last year. The bank's net profits reached JD 844,200.

■ Arab Aluminium Co., made a profit of JD 476,000 in the first half of the year. This figure has decreased from JD 976,000, the figure for the same time last year.

■ It's a good year for the Irbid Electricity Authority. Its revenues for the first half of the year reached JD 15.3 percent. This is an increase of 6.3 percent over the same time last year.

■ The US government have transferred \$50 million to Jordan, a source at the Central Bank said. This is part of a part of an agreement signed between the US government for 1998.

Foreign Exchange

Wednesday, 26 August

	Buy JD	Sell JD
US\$	0.7080	0.7100
£	1.1510	1.1568
DM	0.4124	0.4145
¥	0.4801	0.4825
₹	0.1227	0.1233
YEN (100)	0.5624	0.5652
₪	0.3667	0.3685
₹	0.0419	0.0421

Transparency stressed as way for new government

By Ilham Sadeq
Star Staff Writer

MINISTERS FROM the newly formed government have begun to tackle the critical problems faced by their predecessors in the new and refreshing spirit of 'transparency'. Restoring economic confidence, and financial stability is seen to be at the heart of the cabinet's new agenda.

Political analysts believe that the recent reshuffle was crucial to rebuild the shattered confidence between the nation and its government, and to ease the rising level of frustration felt by the people following the recent scandals over the misleading economic growth rate figures and the water contamination crisis.

Some observers argue that although the burdens faced by the new government are grave, every effort needs to be made to bridge the gap between the government and its people.

His Majesty King Hussein's designation letter focused on internal concerns, calling for immediate solutions to all the nation's problems, such as unemployment and poverty, as well as the revival of the economy and the enhancement of investment in the Kingdom," said Mr Ibrahim Izzudin, a prominent political expert.

The designation letter called for a comprehensive national plan to eradicate poverty and reduce the level of unemployment, the latter being one of the most serious ailments fac-

ing the Kingdom. Past official figures have said that 23 percent of the labor force is out of work, which contradicted with the study of Jordan University's Center for Strategic Studies that puts the figure closer to 27 percent.

The quality of the information supplied by the former government contributed greatly to its fall, as figures released on the economic growth rates and unemployment levels were both disputed, leading to a loss of credibility. Confusing and scarce details following the water crisis further magnified these feelings. Highlighting this problem, His Majesty King Hussein's letter of designation called on the new government to produce honest, objective and transparent official statistics.

Some analysts say that the new government is full of 'economic heavyweights,' with at least 10 ministers having a solid economic background.

Prominent economic analyst, Ahmad Al Nammari, however, argued that both governments belong to the same 'economic school.' "They both adopt what is called the market economy, which focuses on making partnership agreements with Europe and the World Trade Organization, following the trend of globalization," the analyst added.

Al Nammari added that "the equation between normalizing



New government

the relationship with Israel, at the expense of inter-Arab relations, will have very little effect on the overall globalization trend."

Mr Al Nammari concluded by stressing "the need to reinforce the principle of accountability and responsibility, and the need to end nepotism, favoritism and corruption in all sectors of government. What we want is a government that adopts a political and economic plan for the nation, to try and achieve sustainable and balanced development. Also, Pan-

Arab coordination is a must."

Meanwhile, another economic expert, Dr Fahad Al Fanek, known for his pro-government stance, welcomed the newly appointed government saying that, "the most important qualification of Dr Tarawneh is that he is new. A lot of the problems faced by his predecessor have since either been tackled or have gone away. Thus, the prime minister will be starting on a level playing field."

He continued saying, "we don't expect miracles from the

new government because it doesn't have a magic wand, but we do hope that should it face a crisis in the future, it will respond in a quick and transparent manner."

Dr Al Fanek concluded by saying that, "the challenges faced by this government are great, so our expectations are modest. I don't know whether I should congratulate them on their appointment, or to sympathize with them, because of the responsibilities they now have to bear."

Business Chronicle

Tough tasks await newly formed cabinet

FEW DAYS have passed since the new government was formed, but the public, though longing for a change, any change, seem less than enthusiastic about the reshuffle. Meanwhile, people are still keen to utter words of congratulation to the ministers, but are unwilling to speak their mind openly. Others are simply indifferent, believing that the change is merely one of faces and that the same strategies will continue unless the veteran minister come up with revolutionary measures to improve the government's image in the eyes of the people.

Jordanians are now asking whether the government will successfully lead the country into a new prosperous era or will the people only be left with their illusions as was the case with former governments?

The ministers are asked to do their utmost to correct the errors of the former government's economic team and to put their house in order by introducing substantial changes to their public institutions. Some observers are already describing Faysal Tarawneh's government as an 'economic government.' The designation letter sent from His Majesty King Hussein to His Royal Highness Crown Prince Hassan focused on economic issues. In addition it is noticeable that about half of the ministers have economic qualifications and have considerable experience in this field. Prime Minister Tarawneh himself is a veteran economic figure who, it is hoped, will lead the team's efforts to bridge the gap between the government and people, especially after the growth rate figures fiasco and the controversial water crisis.

The new government is going to face countless challenges—drastically increasing poverty, unemployment, combined with administrative sluggishness and nepotism in public institutions are the tip of the iceberg. They must also tackle the privatization issue and liberalize the market to gain membership to the World Trade Organization.

The most urgent challenge, however, is to redeem the government's credibility with the people by becoming more transparent.

The government is facing tough tasks. Only time will tell whether these new faces are capable and, more importantly, whether they are truly committed to solving the nation's ills.

British Airways goes direct to Denver

BRITISH AIRWAYS announced it will start operating daily flights between London and Denver on September 1st, with a 194.38 minute flight of £299, including £45 taxes.

The new service, cutting some three and a half hours off the journey to the Colorado city, was originally scheduled to begin at the start of this summer but postponed because of delays in receiving the necessary US government approvals. It will now take off in time for the Rockies ski season.

Peter Spencer, the airline's Director for the Americas said, "We are delighted that we are finally taking to the runway for the take-off of our new service to Denver. I am completely confident that this is going to become one of the most popular US holiday spots among Britons in both the winter and summer, and great for UK business travelers. The delay has been unfortunate, but it does mean we have had more time

to put our people and plans in place and to ensure the most successful launch of this service."

"We have been receiving great support from the people of Denver in preparing for our new flights—they are very much looking forward to the day when the British are coming."

Denver is the biggest US city not currently served by a direct London flight, and attracts more British visitors than any other US city without a direct flight to the UK. Gateway to the Rocky Mountains and its sky resorts and National Parks, it is a business and leisure destination in its own right. Colorado is the most popular ski area in the USA.

British Airways Holidays is offering a range of skiing holidays in the Rockies this winter, using the new Denver services, with prices starting at £599 for seven nights in Vail.

Floods take an economic toll

By Maggie Farley and Henry Chu

SHANGHAI—The catastrophic floods that are sweeping away Chinese farms and factories and threatening major cities also may wash away some of the country's much-needed economic growth, financial experts say.

The Yangtze and Yellow rivers that cut through the heart of the country overflow so often, with such sudden destruction, that the Yellow is known as "China's Sorrow." This year, waterways in the industrial northeast are breaking their banks as well, increasing the potential devastation and economic disruption at a time when China can little afford it.

This summer's floods have claimed thousands of lives, left millions homeless and caused an estimated \$24 billion worth of damage so far, the government reports. The floods are concentrated in just a handful of provinces, but when railways are swept away, workers diverted from factory lines to man the flood's front lines and harvests destroyed, the effects trickle throughout the country in small but significant ways.

One of the biggest worries in Beijing is how the floods might drag down an already slowing economy, and whether the combination of newly homeless and burgeoning jobless could lead to social unrest.

The government has staked its credibility on achieving 8 percent growth this year to create new work for those thrown out of their jobs under China's market reforms. But reaching that target is unlikely, economists say.

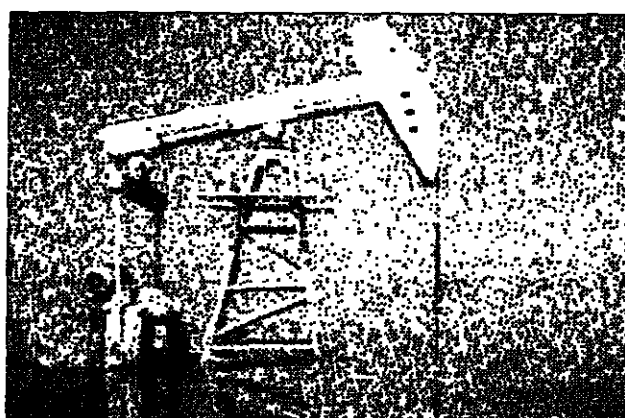
"The floods could reduce GDP by about 1 percentage point," said Andy Xie, a China specialist at Morgan Stanley Dean Witter in Hong Kong, citing the damaged grain harvests and industrial interruption as the largest factors. That means pro-

jected output may fall short by about \$7.7 billion this year.

"The floods are the most visible, but not the most important, reason behind China's economic slowdown," Xie said. The Asian economic turmoil has dried up a significant source of foreign direct investment and hit China's exports hard. But the biggest problems come from economic mismanagement at home, resulting in stockpiles of unsold goods and deflation, Xie said.

Analysts searching for a silver lining say that wide-scale reconstruction after the waters recede actually might boost the economy. "From the macroeconomic point of view, the floods may lift domestic demand. The reconstruction of flooded areas, restoration of agricultural and industrial production and house building will be new stimuli," Wang Guoxing, an associate professor at Fudan University in Shanghai, told the Financial Times. The government has pledged to increase infrastructure spending, particularly in flood-control projects, to stimulate the economy in the second half of the year.

But post-flood repair and environmental protection are different from the type of big payoff infrastructure spending needed to kick-start growth, Xie said. If there is any good economic news to be wrung from the disaster, it is that the flood damage to crops and factories may help shore up falling prices



Production facilities at the Daqing oilfield in northeastern Heilongjiang province have been flooded by waters from the Nen River 22 August. Floods have reduced the daily output of China's Daqing oilfield by 2.1 percent. Current daily oil output at China's largest field is more than 150,000 tonnes against normal output of 153,240 tonnes. Daqing had reopened more than 200 wells, leaving 282 still closed and another 1,443 inundated but still operating. Daqing has more than 25,000 oil wells.

caused by oversupply, he said.

The economic damage wrought by the floods, combined with Asia's economic crisis, also might help minimize political fallout for not achieving growth targets: Natural disasters and external economic crises are not the government's fault. Beijing has enjoyed international praise for keeping its currency stable while its neighbors offer cheaper exports after devaluation. At home, the floods have become a rallying

point to bring together the nation—and distract people from their own problems.

An area of farmland roughly half the size of California is under water, affecting cotton, wheat and rice crops but, significantly, not the autumn grain harvest, which accounts for 75 percent of total grain production. Earlier this week, cotton futures soared on the New York Stock Exchange after early reports that 1.5 million to 2.5 million bales had been

destroyed. China supplies nearly a quarter of the world's cotton.

At the Daqing oil fields in northeastern China, where more than one-third of the country's oil is produced, about 2,500 of the 20,000 oil wells have been inundated, the necks of the pumps dipping in and out of the overflow like dinosaurs lapping at a water hole.

Nearly 1 million soldiers are deployed along riverbanks across the nation, but the nightly news also lauds everyday heroes in their fight against the floods. Recent reports praised one man, Chen Niangen, who drowned while trying to protect a preserve for rare white-finned dolphins; another showed an elderly man who had worked hours to help build a dike to protect his village, squeezing his eyes shut when the dike was destroyed so he wouldn't have to witness waters inundate his hometown.

But the real enemy is not so much Mother Nature as human nature, environmentalists say. Every year, the rivers flood when Himalayan snows melt and summer rains come. But intensive logging in western China has eliminated the stabilizing network of roots that once kept silt from sweeping down the river and filling up lakes and reservoirs, leaving less room for runoff water.

LA Times-Washington Post News Service

Inter.Con. Jordan puts you in touch with the world

Hotel Inter-Continental Jordan has now an Internet service available at the Business Centre

All it takes is a visit to our Business Centre and at a touch of a button you will be able to contact the world.

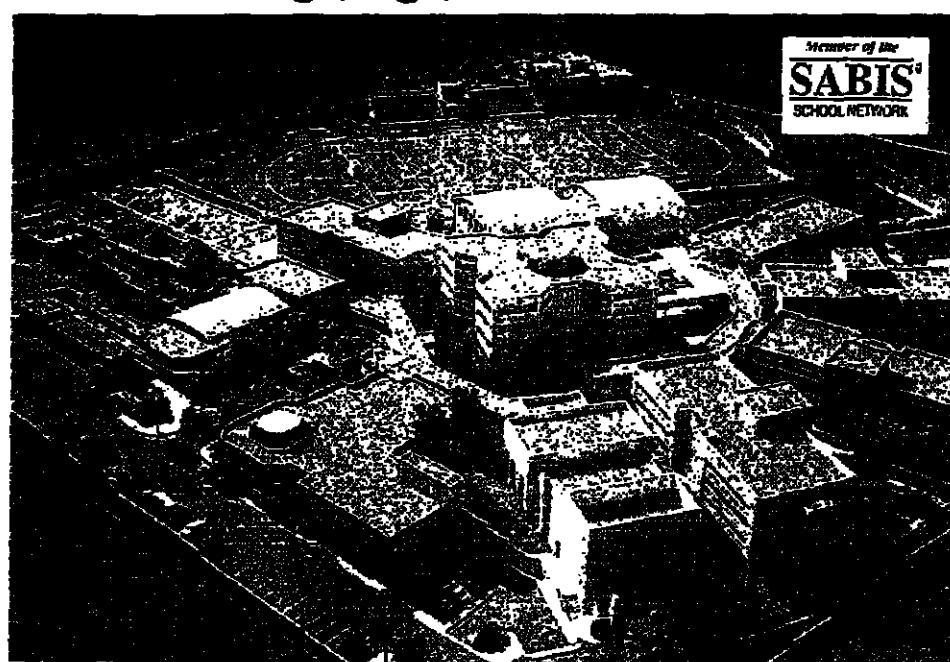
Hotel Inter-Continental Jordan has launched this service as part of its ongoing upgrading programme in both services and facilities.

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Egypt's unique view of terrorism

By Ann LoLardo

CAIRO—At the Al Rahman Mosque along the street of the Pyramids, Sheikh Shabain Shalaby preaches to the faithful about terrorists who kill innocent people, those with God in their hearts.

Whether the victims work in a factory in Sudan or an American Embassy in Kenya, an act of terrorism is the work of the devil, says the Muslim cleric. "No aim is to be achieved in these attacks," he says, as the call for afternoon prayer rings out.

But not all of the Muslims who pray at this corner mosque view the issue as simply as the sheik. Abdel Nabi Khalifa denounces the recent terrorist attacks at the American embassies in Africa, but he feels no compassion for the government that retaliates with military strikes against the Islamic states of Sudan and Afghanistan.

"America is always biased against Muslims," Khalifa said. "I'm sorry for the dead people, but for the American (state), no, I'm not sorry."

Khalifa is not a radical. He is a 34-year-old Egyptian who teaches working-class men how to fix typewriters. He speaks plainly about his feelings and the unique position Egyptians find themselves in these days. Egypt is at the center of Arab culture, but its people remain among the world's poorest. A key ally of the United States, Egypt often finds itself at odds with American foreign policy, especially what it perceives as unconditional support for Israel above all else in the region.

Egyptians have felt the effects of terrorism firsthand. Muslim militants have been waging their own private war to turn this country into an Islamic theocracy. Their campaign, launched in 1992, has left hundreds dead and resulted in mass jailings and government crackdowns. President Hosni Mubarak has been the target of terrorist attacks, most recently in 1995. He said the attempted assassinations were taking refuge in neighboring Sudan, which the Sudanese government denied.

This month, Sudan criticized Egypt for playing host to a meeting of Sudanese opposition leaders. In the wake of U.S. military strikes against Sudan and Afghanistan last week, the Egyptian govern-



Photographs of the bomb blast at the roof of Ufundi House, a seven-story office block that was brought to the ground in the attack on the US embassy. Kenyans have come out sharply divided, with many supporting the US for raiding Sudan for allegedly housing terrorist groups which are responsible for the twin bombs on Nairobi and Dar-es-Salaam US embassies which killed 253 and 10 people respectively.

ment was cautious in its comments. It called on the United Nations to convene an international summit to combat terrorism. But it made no mention of the strikes by the United States from which it receives almost \$2 billion a year in foreign aid.

Khalifa, the typewriter mechanic, understood his government's reticence. "They have their own reasons," he says, referring to the terrorist activity that exists here and in neighboring Sudan.

Saturday, a group calling itself International Islamic Jihad called the office of a well-known Egyptian journalist, Mohammad Salah, and threatened American interests. The call followed statements by

exiled Saudi businessman Osama bin Laden, whom the United States is holding responsible for the embassy bombings in Kenya and Tanzania. Bin Laden said through an Egyptian ally, Ayman al-Zawahiri, that the war between his followers and the United States "has just started."

Salah, a correspondent for

Egypt's leading newspaper, Al Hayat, said he believes the Egyptian public overwhelmingly opposed the US strikes while at the same time recognizing Sudan's past support of terrorists.

"People are conflicted," said Salah. "They know Sudan and Afghanistan export terrorism, but they disagree with the US response. The latest behavior by the United States only makes Osama bin Laden more admired. People sympathize with the underdog."

The city neighborhood where Sheikh Shalaby runs the Al Rahman Mosque reflects the conflicting sentiments and scenes of Cairo. The mosque fronts the wide boulevard that leads to the Giza Pyramids. Along this road are fast-food restaurants imported from America, Kentucky Fried Chicken and McDonalds. Farther down the road are villas and gardens of the rich.

But in the narrow streets behind the mosque, Egyptians live a modest life. Street vendors sit under frayed, sun-bleached canvas umbrellas and sell melons and mangoes, potatoes and squabs from wooden carts. Women in veils and head coverings peer in the windows of jewelry stores or stop at butcher shops to survey meat hanging on outdoor hooks. Men in long cotton caftans amble toward the mosque at prayer time, while others in more secular dress spend the afternoon at a local coffee shop.

Mamdouh al Sharif sat reading the local tabloid paper, Akhbar Al Yom. The front page displayed photographs of a Sudanese man wounded in Thursday's American strike on a Khartoum factory that US officials charge was producing substances for chemical weapons.

Al Sharif expressed what he says many of his fellow Egyptians think. "We cannot deny Sudan and Afghanistan had terrorism movements, but the United States' reaction was the wrong response; it will not deter terrorist activity," he said. "Violence creates more violence," said the 38-year-old mail teacher. And, Al Sharif said, "Americans may well bear the brunt of it even the American Embassy in Cairo, with all its cameras and gates, is not safe. Maybe, one of those groups will enter the gates with a car loaded with bombs."

LA Times-Washington Post News Service

Suspected terrorist apparently led double life

By Steve Berry

MALINDI, Kenya—For four years, Mohammed Saddiq Odeh, also known as Sadik Howaida and internationally suspected as the chief bomber of the US Embassy in Kenya, quietly plied his fishing trade along the Indian Ocean coast in eastern Africa.

He would buy fish in this tourist town of 500,000 and sell them farther south in Mombasa, relatives of his wife said Saturday during an interview that revealed details of the private life of a previously unknown man who has suddenly become a character in a global drama.

To the few family members who know him, he is a bright, intense 34-year-old with an extraordinarily devout faith in the Muslim religion. He never breaks the religious regimen of five daily prayers, they say, and he is quick to scold others who run afoul of the Koran.

But Hassan Omar Hassan, 50, an uncle of Odeh's wife, and Miriam Seif, 35, a sister-in-law, say they never saw him show interest in anything outside the mosque or his fishing business—not politics, not newspapers, not even American—and they never heard him mention the name of Osama bin Laden, the Saudi millionaire whom Odeh and two others have reportedly implicated as the financier of the bombing in Nairobi that killed more than 260 people and injured more than 5,000.

That is why Seif still insists Odeh is not the mastermind of the Nairobi bombing or of the near-simultaneous blast at the American embassy in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania. "He is too religious," she said. As for Hassan, at first he was shocked and disbelieving. But after thinking about how little he knows about Odeh's history—especially the young man's life in Jordan before he entered their world in 1994 as a tutor for the hand of his 12-year-old niece, Nassim Amina Mohammed—Hassan is not so sure.

Odeh is suspected of making the bombs and plotting with several others to blow up the American embassies. Local news reports say he used his



Osama bin Laden

fishing business as a cover for his mission. The Daily Nation, a Nairobi newspaper, has reported that police sources say Odeh and two others—Khalid Salim of Yemen and Abdullah Natcha, from Lebanon—have confessed and said that bin Laden bankrolled the bombing and their fishing business cover.

Hassan and Seif, however, say that during the entire four years they knew him, Odeh never gave the slightest hint that he knew bin Laden. Odeh came into their lives in July 1994. A family friend, whose daughter knew Amina in school, brought Odeh to Hassan's home and said his friend was looking for a wife and wanted to marry Amina, even though they had never met. Hassan had some initial doubts. Odeh would say nothing about his parents or his background.

There have been reports that Odeh joined the Palestine Liberation Organization while studying architecture in Jordan and that, in 1990, he fought alongside the Muslims in Afghanistan against the Communist government. But Hassan family members knew nothing of this background and seemed to believe there was nothing unusual about the match. "You can marry someone from anywhere, as long as they are Muslim," Seif explained.

Hassan said he also found nothing unusual about the arrangement. He thought about it for a couple of weeks, checked with Amina and then gave his consent to the mar-

riage. "We realized Odeh was very religious," he said through an interpreter. "Amina also is very religious. She did not go to discos. She had kept her virginity, so after he sought my consent, we realized these two religious people should stay together."

The couple were married on Oct. 24, 1994. The next day, they moved to Mombasa, where they rented a house and Odeh started his fishing business. Hassan described Odeh as a serious, slender man of average height who wears eyeglasses, a full beard with sideburns and a thin mustache.

Over the years, Hassan said, he never saw Odeh with friends, and he would never watch television or videos. "When the house only to go to the mosque or to work."

Life was routine until February of this year, when Odeh announced that he could no longer afford the rent in Mombasa. By this time, he and Amina had a baby boy. Odeh and Amina moved farther up the coast from Malindi to Lamu, where Hassan allowed them to live in a house that he owned. Odeh never found another job, but Amina was teaching Islam in a school. "I was going to get her a government job, but she refused it and said she wanted to teach Islam," Hassan said.

Then, early this month, they returned to Mombasa. Hassan never saw Odeh after that. Aug. 7, the day the terrorists struck in Nairobi and Dar es Salaam, a week later, authorities arrested a man whose name was widely reported as Mohammed Saddik Howaida. Not until the following week, when reports emerged that the man was an alias for Odeh, did Hassan know that a terrorist might have been in his home as a part of his family.

He rushed to Mombasa looking for Amina, but neighbors told him the FBI and Kenyan police had taken her to Nairobi. He says the authorities tell him she is not under arrest, that she is staying in an undisclosed hotel in the capital and that she is helping them with their investigation.

LA Times-Washington Post News Service

Holy Land prepares to open it's first Casino

By Rebecca Trounson

JERICHO—Rows of towering date palms are in place, along with glittering brass lamps and plush blue carpeting. And the slot machines are ready to go.

A luxury casino, the first in the Holy Land, is about to open here, in a sand-colored building that has risen like a mirage from the desert floor at the entrance to this biblical city. In a few more weeks, developers say, Jericho, best known for the blare of Joshua's trumpets and their legendary impact on the city walls, will ring instead with the sound of slot machines and cash registers.

The opening of the Oasis Casino, tentatively scheduled for September, is the first stage in a \$150-million resort complex that its Austrian developers say will include several hotels, restaurants and a golf course on the edge of ancient Jericho, a sleepy, sprawling town that has been under the control of the Palestinian Authority since 1994.

Authority President Yasser Arafat's cash-strapped government is hoping that the facility will attract thousands of Israelis and foreign visitors to Jericho and pour much-needed tax revenues into the Authority's coffers. "We think this will be good for tourists and good for the Palestinian Authority too," said Mitri abu Aita, Arafat's newly appointed tourism minister.

Israel has no casinos, and efforts to legalize gambling have long been opposed by the country's powerful religious parties. They are not alone. Islamic religious leaders in Jericho and throughout the Palestinian areas also have fought the project. Gambling is "haram"—prohibited by the Koran, they say.

"God said it is forbidden for Muslims to gamble," said Sheikh Harb Jaber, the spiritual leader at Jericho's main mosque, just up the road from the casino. "It is an immoral idea."

Bowing to the opposition, in part, the Palestinian Authority has declared that Palestinians will not be allowed to gamble at the Oasis, although several hundred people from the area are expected to find jobs there, ranging from maintenance workers to croupiers.

Samir Hmeidat is among them. Hmeidat, 37, who lives in the Aqabat Jaber refugee camp directly across the road from

the casino, says he will earn \$900 a month as a security guard, far more than he can make at his current job selling souvenirs.

"Working at the casino, from a religious perspective, is not acceptable. But we accept it because we need the jobs," he said. "Or because we lost faith in God. About 50 percent of the men in Aqabat Jaber are out of work," he said.

As he spoke, Hmeidat and a handful of other men sat outside an unfinished storefront, playing a card game they called "tricks" as the sunlight faded to dusk. Although the loser paid for a round of fruit drinks or sweet tea, they said it was not the same as gambling.

The land for the casino project was donated by the Palestinian Authority. Casinos Austria, the developer, holds a 15 percent stake in the resort, an Austrian bank has 10 percent, and the rest is held by private investors, including many Palestinians, according to Alexander Tuck, the director general of Oasis. And with an eye to its likely clientele, the casino has engaged an Israeli company to handle public relations.

Tuck said the location is ideal: a 30-minute drive from Jerusalem, little more than an hour from Tel Aviv and conveniently close to the popular Israeli spas clustered to the south on the banks of the Dead Sea.

For the first few years, while investors recoup their initial stakes, the Palestinian Authority can expect to earn \$2 million to \$3 million a year in taxes from the casino, Tuck said. After that, the tax rate will triple to about 30 percent of the earnings, he said.

Israeli tourism officials, who have tried for years to persuade political leaders to allow the establishment of an Israeli casino in the Red Sea resort of Eilat, are looking on with envy as the Palestinians complete theirs.

"It's frustrating," admitted Shabtai Shay, director general of the Israeli Tourism Ministry. "On the other hand, in the future, once things become more stable in the region, I hope that Jericho, Jerusalem, the Dead Sea and even Jordan will be looked at as one area for tourism," he said. "The distances are really so small."

LA Times-Washington Post News Service

Missile strikes to intensify hostility toward US

By Rebecca Trounson

JERUSALEM—The US missile strikes at suspected terrorist targets in Afghanistan and Sudan are likely to heighten the resentment and hostility that many in this region already feel toward the world's only superpower, several experts in Islamic extremism said last week.

Indeed, the hatred of the United States that found an outlet in the recent East African embassy bombings may be only the most visible—and by far the most violent—manifestation of frustration felt by many people in the Middle East with US policy here, those interviewed said.

"Many people are outraged over this," said Ziad Abu Amr, a Palestinian legislator and academic who specializes in the study of Islamic fundamentalism. "They were upset with the United States already, and now they are very angry at what they see as the injustice of these strikes."

And Israel's expression of strong support for the American action only served to underline the close friendship between the two countries—a special relationship that, along with continuing Arab perceptions of an imbalance in regional US policy, is one of the root causes of growing anger in the Middle East against the United States, among militants and mainstream people alike.

Even a group of Palestinian men waiting for a wedding to begin Friday in the West Bank city of Hebron took time out to denounce the United States. "America is the No. 1 terrorist country in the world," said one man who gave his name as Yousef. "America wants to control the whole world, and therefore it attacks the weak



A general view showing the flattened rubble of a pharmaceutical factory in the northern outskirts of Khartoum, 24 August. The United States attacked the plant on Aug. 20, saying it was involved in chemical weapons production and had links with Osama bin Laden, accused of being behind the bombings of US embassies in Kenya and Tanzania.

countries." Mohammed Abdel Muneim, the chief editor of the political magazine Rose el Youssef in Cairo, Egypt, said: "The American attitude toward the Arab-Israeli conflict is unfair and biased toward Israel. The extremists can use this fact to convince other people of the justice of their cause."

Muneim said the United States, the main sponsor of the Israeli-Palestinian peace process, has lost credibility with many Arabs for its unwillingness to pressure Israel publicly to accept a US formula for restarting the paralyzed negotiations. The Palestinians accepted the initiative in March, although it fell far below their

expectations. Many Arabs also accuse the United States of having a double standard. For years, successive administrations have turned a blind eye, at least publicly, to Israel's widely known but unacknowledged nuclear weapons program; India and Pakistan, however, were hit with sanctions after they carried out nuclear tests this year.

"This lack of even-handed policy causes many problems for the U.S.," said Muneim, who is also a former spokesman for Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak. More broadly, many Arabs perceive Israel, backed by its superpower ally, as an occupying force on Palestinian land.

With the issue of Jerusalem's Old City and its holy sites among the most sensitive, "The Al Aqsa mosque is considered the third-holiest site in Islam, after Mecca and Medina. In Saudi Arabia, and wrestling control of the Old City from Israel is a rallying cry for many Muslims."

Several of those interviewed noted that an Islamic umbrella group announced this year by Osama bin Laden, the dissident Saudi millionaire whose network of organizations has been blamed for the embassy bombings, said it would fight against Jews and "Crusaders," an allusion to the Christians who once tried to oust Muslims from Jerusalem.

"They see imperialism as a return to the Crusades and lash out against Western ideology, capitalism, culture and, not least of all, secularism," said Uri Kupferschmid, a lecturer in Middle East history at the University of Haifa.

But a US policy toward Israel is hardly the only reason for anti-Americanism in the region. For Muslim fundamentalists, the United States is the embodiment of all the evils of Western society, viewed as lacking in any moral guideposts or religious values. And that culture is spreading, through American movies, television programs and music.

"Islam puts God at its center," explained Menachem Klein, a lecturer in political studies at Bar-Ilan University and a specialist in Islamic extremism. "The Western world, on the other hand, is concerned with liberalism, freedom and democracy. It's absolute heresy. And worst of all, from the Islamic point of view, this culture is increasingly successful."

For many others, the United States is resented because it supports regimes they oppose in their own countries, from Saudi Arabia to Egypt and Jordan.

"Anger toward governments or policies perceived as corrupt or oppressive can quickly turn into anger toward the United States," said Ghassan Khatib, a political scientist at Birzeit University in the West Bank. He noted that Saudi Arabia's alliance with the United States in the 1991 Persian Gulf War, allowing thousands of US troops to enter the conservative kingdom, had helped "earn both nations the enmity of bin Laden."

LA Times-Washington Post News Service

From debt to desperation in Japan

By Sandra Sugawara

TOKYO—Early Thursday, Nobuo Shibata, the 48-year-old president of a small sheet metal company, was found slumped in his car next to his brother. A hose attached to the tailpipe had sent deadly exhaust fumes wafting into the car.

A suicide note found in Shibata's pocket said, "We apologize to all our employees for the slump in our business."

As debate drags on in Japan's parliament about the best way to pull the country out of its recession, the evidence of Japan's dramatic decline appears daily. Struggles such as Shibata's are reflected throughout the Japanese economy as bankruptcies and suicides rise, and as increasing numbers of people who cannot repay loans go into hiding to avoid the stigma of bankruptcy.

Corporate failures surged 35.7 percent in July from a year earlier, to 1,710 cases, and are expected to continue rising, according to Teikoku Databank, a private research group. Personal bankruptcies, which hit 70,000 last year, are expected to top 100,000 this year, according to bankruptcy attorneys. They also estimate that about 100,000 debtors are in hiding.

In 1997, about 3,600 Japanese killed themselves over economic problems, according to the National Police Agency.

Hideo Yamada, a leading bankruptcy attorney, said an estimated 1.5 million people are now unable to repay loans and are struggling to avoid bankruptcy. Some turn to relatives or loan sharks—who often have ties to organized crime groups—for cash, in hopes that their finances will improve and they can repay the money soon, he said.

But with the economy sliding further, many of them may have difficulty doing that. Indeed, earlier this week Economic Planning Agency Minister Tetsuo Sakaiya said the government's assessment of Japan's economic condition might worsen after the release of July economic data.

"In just about all the regions, the economy has become worse," Sakaiya said, according to Reuters News Service.

And Finance Minister Kiichi Miyazawa acknowledged that the bailout of major banks earlier this year did nothing to alleviate the credit crunch, which is making it even harder for companies to get the loans they need to do business. That is expected to accelerate the rate of bankruptcies.

The Japanese Trade Union Confederation, Japan's largest umbrella organization of labor unions, is so concerned about the impact the credit crunch will have on jobs that it recently decided to funnel 20 percent of its strike fund to guarantee loans taken out by companies that employ union members, according to Kyodo News Service.

In the United States, bankruptcy is sometimes seen as a form of creative destruction. Many American entrepreneurs blithely recite the failed business ventures that preceded their successes. Not so in Japan. "To have to borrow, there is a sense of shame. And once you borrow, there is a widespread feeling that you must return," said bankruptcy attorney Kenji Usunomiya.

In fact, companies often try to get rid of employees who have declared personal bankruptcy, said bankruptcy attorney Hideo Yamada. The companies fear such people will sully the firm's reputation, he said. "Legally they can't fire a person because of bankruptcy. But if he gets calls from credit companies at work, then they can use that as an excuse to get rid of him," arguing that it is disrupting work, Yamada said.

So instead of filing for bankruptcy, many people pack up their belongings in the middle of the night and move to another part of Japan. People from cities move to the countryside, where they try to get work as day laborers, while people in the rural areas try to disappear in the cities as waiters or janitors, according to attorneys. Some eventually get caught, particularly if they get sick and must apply for national health insurance, or if they need to enroll their children in school. Others become weary of being away from their family and friends and return to file for bankruptcy and face their creditors.

"I hear that those small construction company owners, some of them have run away because they have so little work, but they still must pay their employees," said Kazuharu Ezawa, an executive with the Construction and General Workers Union.

One former owner of a sporting goods store in Shikoku, a small island south of Tokyo, ran away when he realized his store had failed. In a recent interview, he explained that he was afraid of loan sharks. In addition, he said, "I was scared of being labeled a bankrupt person."

He changed his mind after his daughter, whom he had contacted, convinced him to go to a lawyer. Since then he has successfully discharged his debts through the courts and is a taxicab driver. He wrote a book on the ordeal, because he said he wanted to convince others that it was far better to use the bankruptcy courts than to disappear.

However, he used a pseudonym on the book and refused to allow his real name to be used in this story.

"I don't want my neighbors to know I was once bankrupt," he said.

LA Times-Washington Post News Service

Conflict escalates in Congo

By Lynne Duke

KINSHASA, Congo—As a planned peace summit fizzled, the Congo conflict escalated into full-blown regional war Saturday with Angolan and Zimbabwese troops, backed by planes and tanks, reportedly fighting with President Laurent Kabila's forces to defeat Rwandan-backed rebels trying to oust him.

Rebels of the Congolese Democratic Coalition claimed this afternoon they were only 20 miles from this tense capital city, and a rebel commander, Dioudonne Kabengele, said: "We are preparing for a big showdown in the capital itself."

Kinshasa's capture could set in motion a domino effect of de facto partition in Africa's third-largest nation and destabilize the region. Diplomats say hundreds of Zimbabwese troops, backed by planes, are stationed in and around the city to bolster Kabila's poorly equipped army, but the rebels have proved themselves wily and bold in their three-week campaign.

About 40 miles southwest of Kinshasa at the town of Sana Bata, a Reuters news agency correspondent saw two MIG-21 fighters jet bombing rebel positions today and facing anti-aircraft fire in return. Rebels called the jets Zimbabwese and claimed they shot them down. Zimbabwe denied both claims.

Further southwest, rebel forces also claimed they had fought with a column of Angolan troops and tanks that had pressed into Congo's Atlantic coastal region from the Angolan oil enclave of Cabinda.

In a ratcheting up of regional tensions, Uganda warned Saturday that it may intervene in response to Angola and Zimbabwe's involvement.

Amid all this continental saber rattling, a South African effort to broker a cease-fire appeared to sputter. Kabila and Zimbabwese President Robert Mugabe spurned the summit hosted today in Pretoria by President Nelson Mandela. Only the presidents of Rwanda and Uganda, Pasteur Bizimungu and Yoweri Museveni, attended. Kabila, who remained uninvited, said he was in the southern city of Lubumbashi, believes there is no need



to talk as long as Rwandan troops remain in his country, sources close to him say. Rwanda and Uganda helped put Kabila in power 15 months ago. Their moves against him represent the spectacular unraveling of a regional coalition, as well as the crash of the hopes that greeted Kabila's rise to power when he and his allies defeated Mobutu Sese Seko, the late dictator of this country once called Zaire.

Kabila's rule over this vast and fractured country has been deeply criticized. Despite some economic reforms and enhanced personal security for residents, Kabila's reign has been marred by his ban on political parties, his jailing of opponents and his government's suspicious attitude toward foreign investment. And Congo has been sidelined internationally, with little foreign

aid coming in, because of Kabila's refusal to allow a United Nations team to investigate massacres allegedly committed by his and Rwandan forces during their campaign against Mobutu.

None of Kabila's many fallings out have been more dramatic than the recent one with Uganda and Rwanda. So close were they that Rwandan officers once led Kabila's army, and Uganda offered its guidance as the senior coalition member. But the alliance collapsed over border security issues and disputes about the balance of regional power among them. Both countries refused in May to attend a regional summit on peace and security; nor did they attend the anniversary celebrations that same month marking Kabila's first year in power.

The rebellion began on 2 August

when ethnic Tutsis in the Congolese army mutinied against Kabila. It was launched in the country's far east, but quickly moved by air to the far west when rebels hijacked several airplanes to ferry troops. The Tutsi coalition, representing a small regional minority, soon was joined by other political and military factions. Rwanda denies this role, which diplomats say is indisputable. But like Uganda, Rwanda also has threatened to publicly join the fight.

Though regional and foreign hopes were high that a cease-fire could be brokered in South Africa, Kabila is in no mood to negotiate and his cabinet advised him against it, sources here say.

LA Times-Washington Post News Service

Ancient tradition at Turkish monastery comes under siege

By Amberin Zaman

MIDYAT, Turkey—Tucked amid rugged mountains where Kurdish separatists are fighting the Turkish army, the ancient Syrian Orthodox monastery here usually draws only a trickle of intrepid Christian pilgrims. But lately, a new kind of visitor is turning up.

These days, Turkish secret police and government inspectors arrive several times a month. They are trying to stamp out a 1,600-year-old tradition at Mor Gabriel, the world's oldest functioning monastery, of teaching children the Syrian Orthodox faith and the Aramaic language.

"Should the authorities pursue this ban," said Timoteus Samuel Akkas, the archbishop responsible for the monastery, "we won't be able to train new priests."

Clutching a heavy silver crucifix encrusted with purple stones, Akkas added, "I'll die before I allow that to happen."

Founded in A.D. 397, Mor Gabriel is the spiritual home of the estimated 3 million Syrian Orthodox Christians scattered across the world. Until the 12th century, Christian families sent their first-born sons here to train as monks, priests or teachers. Then Turkey came under Islamic rule, and the monastery, a target of frequent Muslim raids, fell into disuse and became a cowshed for Kurdish farmers.

Turkey's 20,000-member Syrian Orthodox community was allowed to revive Mor Gabriel in the 1920s after the birth of the modern Turkish republic. But under the republic's secularist rules, Mor Gabriel's monks were legally barred from teaching their religion and their language, which is believed to have been spoken by Jesus.

In practice, however, for decades, authorities looked the other way as Christian boys came for evening lessons at the monastery after attending state schools during the day.

That official tolerance ended late last year with the first of a series of demands to stop the lessons.

Asked about the crackdown, government officials say they are simply enforcing a law barring any form of education that is not regulated by the state. They will not explain why they decided only recently to enforce the ban.

Many Christians say they believe that the decision was made by Islamic zealots who remained in the bureaucracy here in Mardin province after Turkey's Islamist-led government resigned in June 1997. They say the Islamists view the Syrian Orthodox monks as rivals who convert Muslims to their own faith.

John Shamoun, the assistant US secretary of State for human rights, told reporters in February that the Islamist provincial governor, Fikret Guven, had assumed him that the pressure on Mor Gabriel would end.

It has not. The governor's office has since ordered all restoration work at the monastery stopped.

Akkas says inspectors have filmed and measured practically every square inch of the sand-colored complex and have returned to make sure nothing has changed.

The religious and language instruction continues but are interrupted whenever the monks spot a government vehicle climbing the hill. Provincial authorities have threatened legal action unless the archbishop sends home the 30 pupils who board here.

An exotic figure in his flowing scarlet habit and embroidered black skullcap with earflaps, Akkas points to newly restored Byzantine mosaics speckling the ceiling of a small chapel where he had just said Mass.

"We thought they would applaud our efforts to preserve a treasure that belongs to all Turks," he said. "Instead, they told us we were breaking the law."

The monastery is also hit by a law allowing only Turkish citizens to serve as priests. Immigration to Europe and the United States in recent decades, Akkas said, has reduced the region's Syrian Orthodox

population from 50,000 to fewer than 3,000. With only eight priests left, he said, he is facing a "serious personnel problem."

The exodus has picked up because of fighting between the army and Kurdish guerrillas, who are Muslim.

Residents of Haberli, a small Christian village 12 miles from the monastery, said they feel pressure from both sides to join the conflict. Visitors must register at a military checkpoint before entering the village, which is guarded by a tank.

LA Times-Washington Post News Service

Archives illuminate Prague Spring

By Peter Finn

PRAGUE, Czech Republic—Two comrades were on the phone, with "the KGB recording every word, and one of them, Leonid Ilyich Brezhnev, general secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, was steamed."

The Prague Spring of 1968 was in full bloom, and in the new openness, someone in the Czech media had dared to call Brezhnev a "Stalinist."

Even general secretaries have feelings. "And what, I might ask, do you say about this?" Brezhnev fumed at Alexander Dubcek, first secretary of the Czech Communist Party.

Dubcek, according to the transcript, fell silent.

Since the collapse of communist rule in 1989, a trove of historical documents gradually has emerged from the secret archives of the Soviet Union and its onetime allies in central and Eastern Europe.

To mark the anniversary of the 1968 Warsaw Pact invasion of Czechoslovakia—launched 30 years ago Thursday—a selection of documents relating to the Prague Spring democratic reform movement and its destruction have been collected and translated into English, many for the first time.



Prague

"Our knowledge is deepening and extending," said Jaromir Navratil, 72, chief editor of the collection, which is being published in the United States by the Central European University Press and the private, Washington-based

National Security Archive. The papers surfaced through the Czechoslovak Government Commission for Analysis of the Events of 1967-70, which was created in 1989 to hunt down documents across Europe.

In all, 140 key documents, culled from 140,000, are being published this month, and they include, besides transcripts of phone calls made by Brezhnev to Dubcek, memoirs, minutes of meetings, cables, private letters and transcripts of discussions among figures on both sides of the Cold War. They have never been published in general readership form in the Czech Republic.

But as understanding of the events of 1968 is enriched by the archival digging of historians such as Navratil, there is a curious phenomenon at work in the city where it all happened. The 30th anniversary of the Prague Spring, when a reformist Communist leadership ushered in economic liberalization, allowed free speech and raised the possibility, at least, of democracy, is being greeted mostly with a shrug.

There is a three-part series on Czech television, there are a few photo exhibitions around town, and Friday there will be a memorial Mass and a commemoration of those who were killed by the invading armies of the Soviet Union, Poland, Bulgaria, East Germany and Hungary. But few Czechs are stopping to dwell on the past. "How does it matter to me?" said Ivan Sobacky, a student.

The Czech polling agency Rendula this week asked 1,421 teenagers, aged 14 to 18, what the words "August 1968" meant to them, and 43 percent said "nothing." One in four did not even know that anything significant had happened.

The ignorance of the young also finds a reflection in the

apathy of their elders. For some observers, the widespread indifference simply masks ideological divisions in Czech society and an unwillingness to confront the Communist past, before and after August 1968.

"Some people think 1968, the Prague Spring, wasn't anything deeper than a fight inside the Communist Party, so why care about it," said Jaroslav Veis, former editor of the political weekly Tyden and now an adviser to Czech Senate leader Petr Pithart.

"Any good or positive memory of the Communist Party today is unpopular," said Karel Šrp, a former dissident who is staging a public exhibition on 1968 in a Prague park. "Even though it's been nine years since the revolution, it is still too early for people to digest their history."

Jan Urban, publisher of the Prague-based monthly Transitions, said that people are not so much avoiding the memory of the Prague Spring but the aftermath of the invasion, when Czech society not only acquiesced to the most oppressive and sterile form of communism but also replenished the purged ranks of the Communist Party.

"You can be defeated and maintain honor and societal ties, but nothing like that was preserved here," Urban said. "Humiliation prevents us from looking back. Why after '68, why after the purges when everything was clear to everybody, why after three years, was the party able to get its membership back? Everyone is a newly born anti-Communist today, so who wants to remember support for communism?"

There are few documents more engaging than the transcripts of Brezhnev snorting and talking. In the lead-up to the invasion, the Soviet leader spent up to seven or eight hours a day jawing on the phone with other Warsaw Pact leaders, especially Dubcek. For more than an hour at one point, Brezhnev, alternately bullying and cajoling, tried to get Dubcek to crack down on the freedom in the streets and purge the reformers from the party ranks.

"You're deceiving us," Brezhnev said repeatedly. And then, calming, he attempted another tack: "Sasha," said Brezhnev, using an affectionate diminutive of Alexander. "I understand that you're nervous; I understand that this situation is very complex for you. But don't you see that I'm talking to you as a friend and that I wish only the best for you."

LA Times-Washington Post News Service



Palestinians burn US flags, 24 August, in protest over US missile strikes in Sudan and Afghanistan. Dozens of supporters of the Islamic Jihad Movement marched through Gaza to the headquarters of the UN Special Coordinator, "Death to America. Death to Israel." A leader of the radical Palestinian movement said on Monday he hoped Moslem militant groups would carry out attacks to punish the United States for their actions.

See the car, know the driver

John O'Dell investigates the current trend for car customizing

LOS ANGELES—From chopped-and-channelled '32 Ford hot rods to fender-flared Honda Civics with \$500-a-copy wheels and computer-generated graphics decorating their flanks, Southern California highways are becoming a showcase for the United States' fast-growing car-customizing craze.

Turning cars and trucks into personalized vehicles that go beyond what the factory dreamed up has been a passion here since the first speed demons pulled the fenders off their 1920s flivvers and lowered them to achieve more aerodynamic shapes in their quest for a few more miles an hour.

The pursuit for personality in vehicles has grown from a backyard hobby dependent on self-taught skills and homemade parts into a \$19.3 billion-a-year industry. In just four years, between 1993 and 1997, spending on improving the appearance and performance of cars and trucks grew 34 percent.

And all along the way, Southern California has set the trends. The hot rod, the full-custom "lead sleds" of the 1940s and '50s, and the lowrider all came out of back yards and back-alley garages around Los Angeles.

Perhaps the biggest change in car customizing in the last decade has been its gradual switch from a largely do-it-yourself hobby into a major do-it-for-me business, says Jim Spoonhower, chief statistician for

the Specialty Equipment Market Association, the automotive aftermarket industry's trade group. Only about 20 percent of the parts and services sold to owners after they buy their vehicles—the so-called aftermarket—is sold to do-it-yourselfers, Spoonhower says.

The other big change is that while it is still a largely male hobby, customizing is seeing more and more women in the driver's seats. That's largely because the two newest trends involve vehicles—import sedans and sport-utility vehicles—that appeal to women.

"It's the late 20th century, and girls are going against male chauvinism," says Edward Eng, an editor at Illustrated Graphic Communications Inc., a Huntington Beach, Calif., publisher whose magazines chronicle both the import-auto and sport-utility scenes. The goal of the new era of customizer is to achieve a base vehicle that is superclean, "like a factory car, only a lot better," Eng says.

Outrageously altered metalwork is out, as are big chromed bumpers and huge hood scoops. Instead, the modern customizer smooths out the body and then embellishes it with either a wing, a spoiler, a high-performance engine, improved suspension, fancy wheels and tires, or a paint-and-graphics scheme to make it unique.

Most customizers also pay tremendous attention to the interiors of their vehicles,



Roy Schmidt works on reshaping a front fender for a 1940 Hollywood Graham at So-Cal Speed in Pomona, Calif. The shop is a mecca for hot rodders and custom car enthusiasts. Photo by Gina Ferazzi.

often spending thousands of dollars on custom stereos and upholstery jobs. "Sport-ute" enthusiasts often take it to the extreme, installing satellite navigation systems and integrated electronic entertainment packages that include super stereos, computer game systems and television-VCR units with monitors installed in the headrests of each seat.

About 40 percent of all the money spent on customizing last year was spent on automotive sound and entertainment systems, Spoonhower says. But customizing—"personalizing" is perhaps a better way to describe the phenomenon—isn't just about Hondas and Expeditions. Just look at any well-stocked magazine rack—there are scores of periodicals devoted to vehicles of all types and how to make them look better and run better.

Among other things, they show the tremendous breadth of the customizing culture, which these days cuts across age, gender and ethnic lines. Enthusiasts are buying elaborately painted vintage Chevrolet lowrider cars, built by custom shops in Los Angeles and Orange County, and shipping them across the Pacific to their homes in Japan.

Latinos, though still deeply involved in the lowrider culture, are discovering imports. Elaborately lowered Hondas and Volkswagens, some equipped with the same hydraulic systems that make conventional lowriders hop and bob, are turning up with regularity at competitive lowrider car shows.

And women, while still most active in the import and SUV arenas, are building and driving hot rods and muscle cars. "Everyone wants to feel distinctive, and the car is just a great tool to create an individual image," says Howard Becker of Becker Automotive Design in Los Angeles. That search for individuality is the underpinning of the entire car-personalizing industry.

Customizing can be as basic as adorning a vehicle with a message-bearing bumper sticker or sticking a clown head on the radio antenna. The car owner is making a statement and using the motorcar as the medium. It goes from there all the way to

the old-fashioned definition: building a unique car, a one-of-a-kind body and interior constructed from scratch.

In most cases today, though, customizing connotes making a change that, by its nature, puts the owner's personal stamp on the vehicle.

"I just think that what you drive says a lot about you, so you want it to look nice and to be something special," says Tammy Agajanian. The Huntington Beach resident drives a mildly custom sport-utility vehicle that she bought and designed in 1994. Besides swapping the stock cloth interior for custom leather upholstery, she had all of the trim, body moldings and manufacturer's name badges removed—a process called shaving the body—"so it would have a clean, sleek look."

The reasons cars have become canvases are as simple—and as complex—as sex appeal, the drive for status and the search for meaning in our lives.

"The car is a good starting place for showing the world that you are on your way up," says Will Miller, an Indiana psychologist who recently conducted a national survey of car owners for software giant Microsoft Corp.'s Internet auto shopping service.

"It's status. It's, 'Look at me!'" says John Butler, sales director at Steve Miller Sportparts Inc. in Costa Mesa, a major car and sport-utility vehicle customizer and performance tuner.

It's also about sex appeal, attracting others by showing off one's physical prowess or beauty, says Marshall Fishwick, an American studies professor at the University of Virginia whose courses include a section on car culture. He claims as a former student author Tom Wolfe, whose 1965 book, "The Kandy-Kolored Tangerine-Flake Streamline Baby," helped popu-

larize the custom-car culture.

"Customizing used to be pretty gender-specific," Fishwick says. "It was the male's business. And some of the accoutrements on custom cars are pretty macho."

But now, both men and women embellish their cars with custom paint, wheels and body modifications to strut their stuff, Fishwick says. And the custom movement is not fading away. A stroll through a roadster or hot-rod show might argue otherwise because of the preponderance of aging baby boom males who participate in that particular arena.

But Dan Fink, whose DF Metalworks in Huntington Beach builds classic roadster hot rods for mostly well-heeled businessmen, says he also sees growing interest by younger car owners in the art of car customizing. The reason is the fast-growing import performance segment of the market, fueled—as was the custom movement of the 1940s—by relatively low-cost cars that young drivers can work on themselves. Where many of the modifications they make are performance-oriented, appearance is equally important, and most owners are spending thousands of dollars on parts and equipment to improve the looks of their cars. The cars are usually Asian imports, with the Honda Civic leading the pack.

"It's been 43 years, since Chevrolet brought out the 1955 Bel Air, since we've had a platform like this," says Pete Chapouris, whose So-Cal Speed Shop in Pomona is a mecca for hot rodders and custom car enthusiasts alike.

"We're excited about it. It's bringing out a whole new crop of enthusiasts."

LA Times-Washington Post News Service

FBI, Interpol hope to catch art thieves in a World Wide Web

By Michael James

THE FBI and Interpol have taken an interest in art. In coming months, their Web sites will feature hundreds of pictures of the world's greatest masterpieces—from Degas to Rembrandt to Van Gogh.

And they are all stolen. Interpol calls the new program "Les Oeuvres d'Art Les Plus Recherchées"—the Most Wanted Works of Art. Its aim is to use the global reach of the Internet to track down missing paintings, sculptures, etchings, tapestries and any other priceless object that have disappeared into the shadowy world of international art thievery.

"Our key focus is to get the word out that a piece has been stolen," said Lynne Richardson, an FBI program analyst who coordinates the bureau's National Stolen Art File. "The Internet is going to change the way we do that."

An estimated \$3 billion worth of stolen art works are unaccounted for around the world, according to authorities with the Art Loss Register, a London-based company that keeps a database of more than 100,000 missing pieces.

Thieves have stolen 121 works by Rembrandt, 250 by Chagall, 180 by Dali and 115 by Renoir, according to the register, which is used by police agencies worldwide for clues in art cases. The database is compiled by a private firm funded by art dealers and insurance companies.

The "honest" works of art often are shipped to other countries for sale, requiring international policing efforts to get them back. The Internet gives authorities the ability to cross borders electronically and put out the word.

Richardson, a former museum registrar at Thomas Jefferson's Monticello homestead who the FBI hired to guide its art-tracking efforts, started posting

pictures of missing art work on the Web in June. She is working closely with Interpol, the international police agency based in France, which also is preparing a Web site containing dozens of notorious art crimes.

"It will be broken down by category, so that if you click on 'sculptures,' you'll see all types of missing sculptures that were stolen," said Interpol Senior Analyst Angela M. Meadows. "The hope is that someone here or in another country may come across the item and recognize it from the picture."

It's doubtful that Picasso envisioned today's computer age and the way that the Internet pervades so much of everyday life. But if he were alive today, he would be able to search for stolen masterpieces—including his own. Authorities estimate there are more than 350 stolen Picassos missing throughout the world. Many are lesser works, including etchings the size of a slide of film, but 88 of them are paintings, said Anna Kisliuk, director of the Art Loss Register office in New York.

Some Picasso pictures will be posted on either the FBI or Interpol Web sites, which are in their fledgling stages. But the two law enforcement agencies have high hopes that the sites will eventually make a dent in the business of art thieves.

The criminals and their crimes are diverse, running the gamut from smash-and-grab robbers at Florida truck stops to heavily-armed masked bandits looting European museums.

One of the first cases to be put on the FBI Web page is the biggest art heist in history—a robbery at the Isabella Stewart Gardner museum in Boston on March 18, 1990. Two men dressed as Boston police officers tied up museum guards and hauled off 11 masterpieces worth about \$300 million. Among the works taken were Vermeer's "The Concert,"

Rembrandt's "Storm on the Sea of Galilee" and Degas' "Program for an Artistic Soiree." None have been recovered and the intruders, both wearing false black mustaches, have not been arrested.

"All logical leads have been followed through with no positive investigative results," said the FBI Web page entry, which advertises a \$5 million reward for recovery of the works. Each of the stolen paintings can be viewed with a click of a mouse.

Officials familiar with art crime are quick to point out, however, that the bulk of the thefts involve criminals who lack style and sophistication—to put it mildly.

In London, for instance, a petty thief named Russell Grant-McVicar walked into the Lefevre Galleries in March 1997 and asked an employee if a particular painting was a Picasso. When he found it was, he threatened the employee with a sawed-off shotgun, grabbed the painting and ran out to a waiting taxicab.

The painting was the "Tete de Femme," valued at roughly \$1 million. It was recovered and Grant-McVicar was arrested after he left an important clue behind in the cab—the painting's frame, covered with his fingerprints.

"Most of them are not the Cary Grant 'To Catch a Thief' types," said the FBI's Richardson. "Most of the thefts are lower level. Very often, the thief may not even know what they have or how valuable it is."

That fact caused some debate about whether the pictures and descriptions of the paintings should be included on the Web sites. Art industry and insurance companies have shied away from publicizing details of the thefts.

"Many times the thief knows that art and antiques have value, but that's all," said Kisliuk, of the Art Loss Register. "One concern is that we don't want to help them understand what they've got."

But recent thinking is that the pluses of putting the pictures on the Web are likely to outweigh any negatives, said the Art Loss Register's marketing director, David J. Shillingford.

"These items will start off in the underworld and every time they change hands, they come one step closer to the legitimate market," Shillingford said. "Each step along the way is another chance for somebody to recognize the item. Pictures on a Web site can increase people's awareness of what to buy and not to buy."

Stolen art often finds its way back into the public domain, although it sometimes takes decades. Edouard Manet's 1880 painting "Peaches" was recently recovered 20 years after being stolen in New York City. A Florida art dealer had contacted the Art Loss Register about the painting, worth well over \$200,000, after it had been offered to him for sale. The FBI is still looking for the thief.

Some of the biggest thefts, which seem to have involved extensive planning, seem to offer less hope. In July 1994, armed men hid in a museum in Frankfurt, Germany, until closing, then tied up the guards and stole \$40 million worth of paintings by English master J.M.W. Turner.

The likelihood of such hugely expensive and well-known paintings turning up at an auction or a dealer's shop is practically nil. So the question becomes, why take them? What could be done with them? What private collector would spend so much money on a painting that he could never show to anyone?

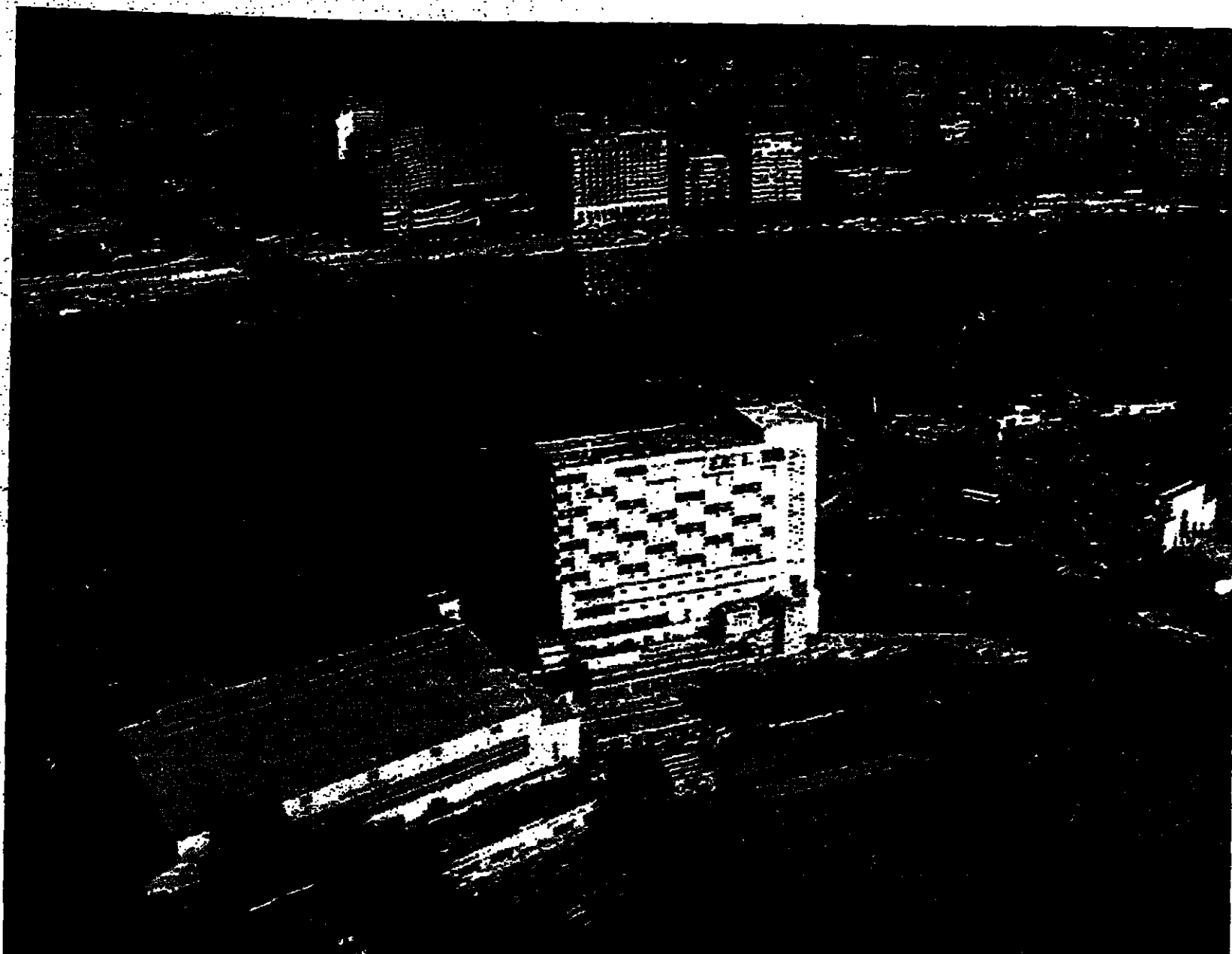
"It's only the thieves who are caught that you know anything about," Kisliuk said. "The ones who get away with it, you never get to know."

LA Times-Washington Post News Service



The FBI hope to catch art thieves through the Internet. It is hoped the Web site will also act as a deterrent to thieves.

Egypt — From now to eternity



An overview of Luxor.

By David Garson

THERE IS no doubt in my mind that Egypt has a timeless and even mystical appeal and certainly has been attracting travelers from far and wide for many centuries. Ancient civilizations have left their imprints on the landscape, creating what today must surely rank as one of the most amazing sightseeing destinations in the world. It is a land of huge contrasts where both the ancient and modern way of life exist side by side.

I suppose one of the truly fantastic Egyptian destinations is Luxor which is set on the east bank of the Nile, about 500 km south of Cairo, and in olden times was the burial grounds of the Kings and Queens of Upper Egypt. It was part of ancient Thebes and renamed by the Arabs as Luxor — "the city of palaces".

Something not to be missed is a visit to the temple of Karnak, one of the greatest places of worship in history, with its impressive structures, and colossal statues, obelisks and halls, all of which takes on an even greater beauty at night when everything is illuminated with the wonderful "sound and light" show.

Future visitors to Luxor will be able to enjoy annually a most spectacular cultural event, namely the staging in the open air of Verdi's magnificent opera *Aida*. My wife and I were fortunate enough to be invited to this year's production which took place at the Temple of Queen Hatshepsut and was certainly the most spectacular opera

production we have ever seen.

Compled with the amazing staging and the natural beauty of the surroundings was some memorable singing and superb playing by the combined orchestras namely the Cairo Opera orchestra and the Cairo Symphony orchestra. One light hiccup, I did feel that if large screens had been erected on either side of the stage it would have given the audience the feeling of intimacy when the romantic arias were being sung, but no matter it was still an unforgettable experience and happily one that can now be seen every year during the month of October.

Furthermore, plans are also afoot for at least five other open air locations to have annual cultural events with artists performing from all over the world. These are truly exciting times in Egypt for lovers of music and the arts, as well as everything else that there is to appreciate and enjoy in this wonderful country.

A short journey from Luxor, across the mighty river Nile, takes you to some of Egypt's most spectacular relics. These include the tombs of the Valley of the Kings, where 64 pharaohs are depicted in enormous relief hewn in the rock, with one of the most important tombs being that of Tutankhamun; and the Valley of the Queens who also made Luxor their capital.

There are a bevy of hotels from the most luxurious, with the Sheraton and the famed Winter Palace (now known as the Sofitel Winter Palace) hotels being two of the finest.

Should you prefer a more "sporty

holiday" with some snorkeling and diving thrown in, then just arrange to visit the resort of Sharm El Sheikh, set on the seemingly endless coastline of the Sinai Peninsula and fringed by the crystal clear waters of the Red Sea.

This is a stylish beach resort with modern hotels and is ideal for those who like to combine watersports, sunbathing and bargaining in the many and varied shops, as well as taking in some exciting sightseeing.

Most of the big chains have fine hotels in this splendid resort. I would like to feature one which offers everything, and more, for those wanting a carefree time in Sharm El Sheikh. It is the Novotel Coralia situated in a delightful position overlooking the picturesque Nasma Bay. The hotel offers every comfort that one would expect in a four star hotel, including attractively furnished rooms with balconies — many with fine sea views. All have direct dial telephone, minibar and air conditioning. There is a wide choice of dining options including the lovely beach front restaurant "Al Assala," a fine Italian restaurant "Al Dente," as well as the "Black Coral" for an interesting choice of international cuisine. To cater for every situation the hotel also has an excellent coffee shop open throughout the day and night, so you need never go hungry!

The hotel is happy to arrange interesting excursions for their guests including a visit to St. Catherine, one of the oldest Christian monasteries in the world, which is today the centre of religious tourism in Sinai. The drive to

St. Catherine takes you through the very heart of the Sinai desert with its ever changing colour of natural stones and sand with the occasional glimpse of greenery and the natural beauty of the elements over thousands of years that not even a Henry Moore could have sculptured better! On your way you may come across some of the Bedouins that still live in the desert with their herds of camels, goats and sheep.

St. Catherine is the highest spot in the Sinai peninsula at 2,642m with Mt. Sinai being the second highest at 2,285m. Many people enjoy an early morning climb hoping to reach the peak of Mt. Sinai just as the sun is rising — a memorable sight indeed!

Just 25km from Sharm El Sheikh you can take another excursion to Ras Mohammed — Egypt's first Marine National Park. First opened in 1989, the park contains many interesting geological items such as uplifted coral reefs, alluvial plains, sandstone mountains, and sand dunes. It is also home to many terrestrial animals including wild goats (ibexes), foxes, gazelles and reptiles such as snakes and lizards. There are also many species of migrating birds, including the white stork, with the magnificent mangrove trees providing an important breeding area and habitat for both the migratory and residents birds.

For lovers of the sea, day trips can be arranged by boat for snorkeling and scuba diving. Alternatively, there are glass-bottom boats enabling you to see and marvel at the many species of fish, as well as the beautiful shades of unusual coral and ocean gardens.

The hotel also provides a variety of sports activities from volleyball, football, tennis, motor cycling, water-skiing and windsurfing.

A popular evening excursion is to attend a typical Bedouin dinner at Wadi Mena where you can also take a camel ride — it might be sensible to take your camel ride before partaking in the Bedouin feast!

All in all, Sharm El Sheikh is a wonderful resort, to do as little or as much as you like, with almost guaranteed sunshine all the year round. In the Novotel, you will find that all the staff are friendly, polite and eager to please. There are, of course, the typical attributes of the Egyptian people as a whole.

How to get your Egyptian destination? Just allow yourself to be welcomed aboard an Egyptian flight. This was the first airline to be founded in Africa and the Arab World over 65 years ago, when air travel was truly in its infancy. Today, with Egypt being one of the world's favourite holiday destinations, it is a pleasure to be able to fly from almost any major European city with their national carrier. During your flight the cabin crew will do their best to ensure that you are well looked after and when you reach your holiday destination you will certainly enjoy being in a country that you will want to return to again and again — for Egypt is, beyond doubt, a very special country.

The author, based in the UK, is an award-winning travel writer

Ozone depletion begins to worry experts

By Ilham Sadeq
Star Staff Writer

THE CURRENT climatic changes in the world, especially the dramatic rise in temperatures, are beginning to worry experts.

Scientists have attributed the phenomenon to the depletion of the ozone layer, caused by the release of harmful "greenhouse gases" into the atmosphere. The ozone layer functions as a filter, reducing the harmful effects of the sun's rays. The knock on effect of an increase in temperatures has caused ice caps to melt, leading to a rise in water levels and subsequent flooding.

The latest climatic changes experienced throughout the world, like the recent heat wave that hit this region, could be a result of the ozone hole," said Dr Ahmad Malayari, a chemical and mechanical engineer at the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO). A few years ago, scientists and researchers warned of the grave consequences if the ozone hole becomes wider.

Dr Numan Shehadeh, professor of Climatology from the Department of Geography at the University of Jordan, clarified that "ozone is a very light gas, and is located in a layer around 35-50 kilometers from the earth's surface." It protects the earth from the sun's ultra-violet rays, which are responsible for a number of fatal diseases, especially skin cancer. "We are lucky that the ozone hole first came to light over the South Pole, which thank God, is not inhabited by people. This gives us an opportunity to prepare for the future, should the hole get worse," Dr Shehadeh added.

However, scientists have discovered another hole this year over the North Pole. Their existence is due to the density of the atmosphere — these regions have the thinnest atmosphere. This fact forced many countries to draw up measures to prevent further depletion of the ozone layer. Many agreements have been signed in this regard, most notable is the Montreal Protocol.

In Jordan, a comprehensive survey and field study was concluded by a team from the General Corporation for Environmental Protection. It identified substances that are harmful to the ozone (like Chloro Fluoro Carbon (CFC) gases found in refrigerators), and made recommendations to removing them from the equation. Jordan acceded to the Vienna Convention for the Protection of the Ozone layer, and to the Montreal Protocol on Ozone Depleting Substances (ODS). A multi-lateral fund was set up as a result of the two agreements, which offers assistance to developing countries so that they can substitute the substances that deplete the ozone layer. Jordan is currently implementing such projects with the help of UNIDO.

Dr Malayari of UNIDO has been assigned to supervise this process in Jordan, and is currently working with Jordanian factories that use these harmful substances. "The ozone layer has been damaged, and that's why the Montreal Protocol was created — to assist developing countries phase out CFCs," he told The Star. Most of the projects are expected to be completed by the end of this year.


Dr Malayari elaborated further on the problem in Jordan.

"So far, there are 16 local industrial companies that are benefiting from the CFC phase-out projects, at a total cost of around \$10 million. In the domestic refrigerator and freezer sector, there are three factories responsible for the majority of the Kingdom's consumption of the CFC11 and CFC12 gases. Through implementing these projects in Jordan, the Kingdom will be safeguarding its ozone layer and protecting the environment." The expert pointed out that there is no ODS being produced in Jordan.

"All such substances currently in the country have been imported by the user. The total annual consumption of the refrigeration subsector was estimated at 34 metric tons of CFC11 and 13 metric tons of CFC12," he added. In total, about half a million refrigerators and freezers are in use in Jordan, nearly three percent are serviced yearly. Due to a lack of environmental awareness, know-how and equipment in this sector, service staff often use CFC12 for cleaning the cooling systems, instead of using "environmentally friendly" vacuum pumps.

There are five investment projects under implementation in Jordan at the moment, namely at the Middle East Co., the National Refrigeration Co., the Housing Appliance Manufacturing Co., Abidin Industrial Establishment, and the Ihsan/Tahseen Baalbaki Co.

However, the problem is not restricted to refrigerators only. "The Montreal Protocol highlights other ODS within the industrial manufacturing sectors, like solvents, halons, and some types of foam helping in," Dr Malayari said. This will be Jordan's next challenge in helping prevent further depletion of the ozone layer.



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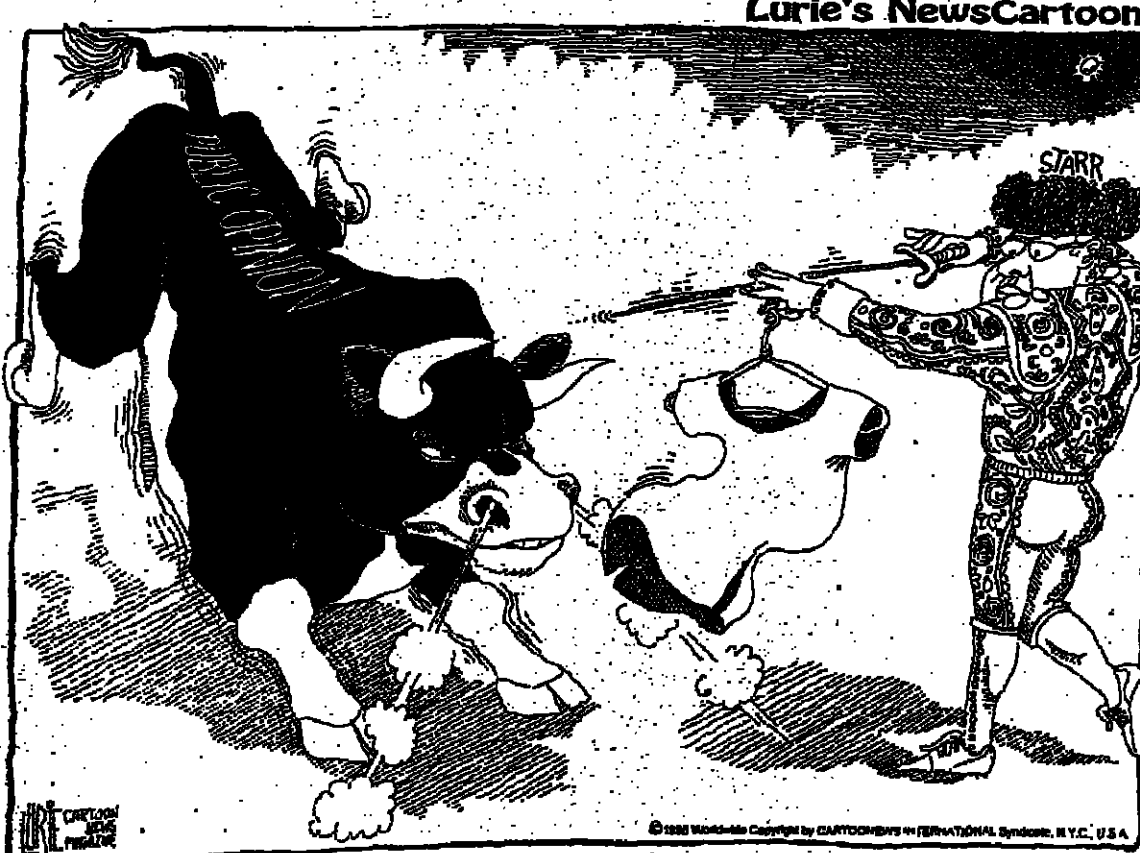
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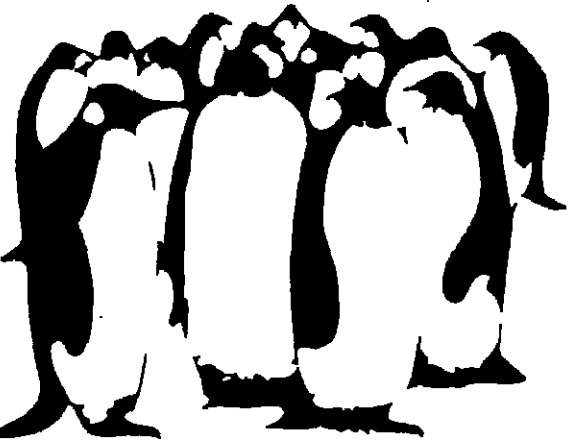


STARR

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Monica's Dry Cleaning

05.08.1998

AROUND
TOWN

A group wedding

A large group wedding was held at the Royal Automobile Club, Monday. The festival was organized by the Al Rum and other companies in the private sector. More than 5000 attended. Senator Laila Sharaf was the guest of honor. Mr Awni Al Akeh, chairman of the board of Al Rum made a point of stressing that shooting during weddings must be stopped as it leads to loss of life.

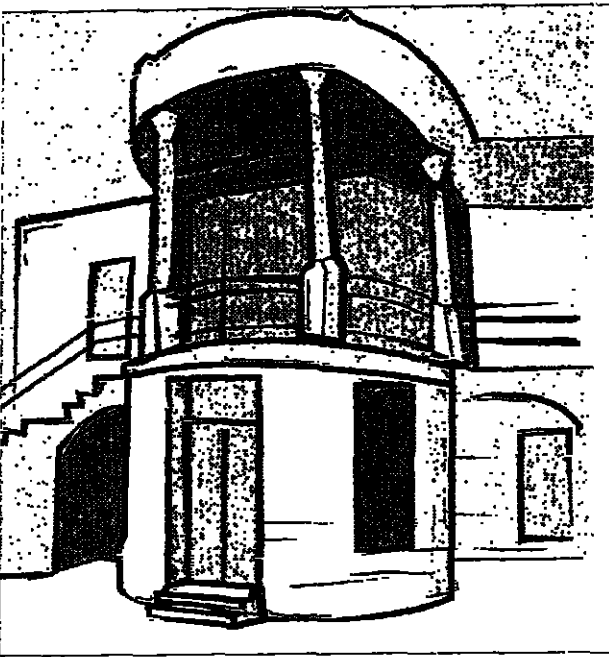
Darat Al Funun

Summer Festival
brightens up AmmanBy Ghassan Joha
Special to The Star

OVERLOOKING the heart of Amman and housed in three historical sites of the 1920s, Darat Al Funun is dedicated to the promotion of arts, and in fostering a cultural and creative dialogue among all art lovers in the Arab World.

The Darat seeks to strengthen the vitality—and appreciation of—contemporary Arab art, and to help today's visual expressionism take its deserved place as a cornerstone in the building of a contemporary Arab culture. It was conceived as a specialized art centre, incorporating exhibition spaces, a research-and-video library, open workshops and studios, resident artists' quarters, as well as venues for the performing arts. With their massive walls and elevated ceilings, the galleries of the Darat introduce a new art exhibition concept.

Established by the Abdul Hameed Shoman Foundation in 1993, the Darat aims to preserve the country's heritage by



restoring architectural classics of all ages, whilst making art accessible to a wider segment of society. The Darat is unique

in Jordan, occupying three buildings, and the remains of a 6th century Byzantine church.

Since 1995, the Darat has held an annual summer festival, celebrating the visual and performing arts. On 20 August, it opened the fourth summer exhibition, under the patronage of the Minister of Culture. It features six art shows in all, displaying works from both Jordan and abroad.

There is a diverse range of work on display, like the simple abstract paintings of the Iraqi artist Samer Osama, to the dilution works of Jordan's Saeed Haddadin, to the structural art of Samia Zaru, the memorial photos of Hussein Da'seh, Sahel Al-Hiyari's colourful artworks. There is also the display of 50 Lebanese graphic artists.

All Maher, director of the Darat, told *The Star* that the main objective behind the exhibition is to show artworks—from both well-known and up and coming Arab artists—which will satisfy and inspire all generations.

On entering the Blue House, which houses all the paintings and is next to the

Darat's management office, you will observe the work of Samer Osama—a painting on wood using lead, cement and graphite, all mixed with acrylic. This particular work makes you think about nature and the environmental impact of man, whilst still being a visual delight. Holding a Diploma of Graphic Art from the Institute of Fine Arts in Baghdad, Osama has participated in three solo exhibitions over the past six years and now works as a Graphic studio supervisor at the Darat.

Still in the Blue House, Saeed Haddadin has used oil and water colors on paper and canvas, depicting both the mental and psychological realities. Born in Ma'in village, near Madaba, the artist obtained his BA degree in Arts from the Lvov College of Art in Russia. He has participated in many exhibitions during his years of study at Kiev and Lvov, and is a founder member of the Jordanian Arts Association.

Another artist is Samia Al Zaru, whose emotive works are shaped from iron and rocks, and are on view in the open air gallery of the old Byzantine church. The shapes talk of the traitorous period of time, set in a historical venue. She examines the relationship between art and the dynamic world.

The next venue is in the Museum, which is filled with a wide selection of paintings and leads to the Library, which is where Hussein Da'seh is displaying his 16 photographs, titled "Memory of a Place." Da'seh describes himself as an artist and art critic, who is trying (through his reflections) to re-capture the past—the age of his grandparents) to save endangered sites soon to be demolished by man. His earlier inspirations came from the camera. "I fell in love with photography from an early age, which helped me to reflect on my experiences of living in many camps and cities within Jordan," said Mr Da'seh. Born in 1962, he studied painting and photography in Amman's Fine Arts Centre and Baghdad's Institute of Fine Arts, between 1978 and 1982. As'ad Orabi, another art critic, called Da'seh's works,



"Self-Portrait" (1982), one of the many on display from the Lebanese collection

obtained a Masters in Architecture (Urban Design) from Harvard University in 1990, as well as two Bachelor of Architecture and Fine Arts degrees from Rhodes Island School of Design in 1988.

This year's festival includes many lectures from artists and academics alike, similar to that held last Sunday by Mrs Zaru, in which she talked about her artistic experiences. This Sunday, there will be a lecture titled "Analytical Study of Plastic Art in Jordan from the Seventies," by Dr Khaz'al Al Majidi, starting at 7 pm. There will also be several music concerts during the festival, with the National Music Conservatory Group performing this Tuesday at 8 pm. Several Art films are on offer as well, like the "The New York Art Scene" which will be shown today, Thursday, 27 August at 6:30 pm.

Darat Al Funun's Summer Festival will run for 40 days, and will be on display to the public until the end of September.



Main Hall in Darat Al Funun

Congratulations



Tala Shriem became engaged to be married to Mahmoud Aziz who is a dental technologist. The ceremony took place at the Amman International Hotel last week.

Omega and Cindy Crawford,
at the European Masters in
Crans Montana

Cindy can play better and this year, she's going to prove it. This is the promise Cindy Crawford has made to herself and her fans in anticipation of the 2nd annual Omega Celebrity Golf Tournament held on 31 August, in magnificent Crans Montana. Cindy Crawford and N.G. Hayek, Chairman of the Swatch Group and Chairman and CEO of Omega, will be the top headliner of a roster of stars from the worlds of fashion, cinema, and sports who will be competing in a friendly yet fierce fashion for the 1998 Cup.

Omega President, Michele Soffist, said that the Omega Celebrity Tournament is not just about our relationship with golf and the wonders of the sport itself, but also about the emotion of spending time together with people of different nationalities and cultures. "It's really about coming together."



Over 20 countries participated in the '97 edition. This year Omega has also invited celebrities and VIP from South America and Australia. "The

Omega Celebrity Golf Tournament is great fun," according to Eugene Cernan, last man to walk on the Moon and one of last year's runners-up. "You may win the game, but for sure you'll win some new friends." We asked Marketing Director, Venanzio Ciampa, what surprises Omega has in store for this year's tournament, but he uncharacteristically dodged behind a wall of silence. "Then there'd be no surprise any more, no?"

We did learn however that Omega will be launching its new Constellation jewelry Collection during the tournament and that famous guests among the stars will be involved in it. Michele Soffist explained, "We hope to match the beauty of our collection to the majestic mountains which surround Crans Montana."

AGENDA

Exhibitions

■ Paintings by 18 artists from Egypt, Syria, Iraq, Palestine and Lebanon at the Al Mashriq Gallery, Shmissani. It continues till 1 November.

■ The exhibition of the Artist Khaled Hamzeh at the City Hall in Ras Alaan, will continue till the end of this month. There is another exhibition by Yassen Mohamadawi going on at the same time at the gallery.

■ The relations between man and nature is an exhibition that is currently running at the Orient Gallery in Shmissani. The exhibit, displaying the works of artists from various Arab countries, ends 10 September.

■ The summer '98 exhibition continues at Darat Al Funun. This is an annual exhibition of arts and graphics from different Arab artists. Besides

the art exhibit, there is different lectures on art that is going almost everyday.

■ Rowaq Al Husn is holding a permanent exhibition by artists Mohamad Abu Zureiq. The Jordanian artist is a well-known veteran in the Jordanian art movement.

■ An art exhibition by Rula Shukairy at the French Cultural Center will start on 1 September. The exhibit deals with the phenomenon of light as one of the most important issues of life. The event ends 30 September.

■ Exhibition of wrought iron furniture by Jordanian artist Saleem Bandak at Al Baydar Hall in Kan Zaman village. It continues till 17 September.

Films

■ Stargate, a science fiction movie, starring Kurt Russell and James Spader, is showing at the American Center on Thursday 3 September at 5 pm.

The Star's GUIDE

Programs on JTV
from 29 August—4 September

ENGLISH PROGRAMS

SATURDAY

3:00—Holy Koran
3:10—Postman Pat (Cartoon)
3:30—Clowning Around
4:00—Neighbours (Drama)
4:30—Scandi Nature (Doc.)
5:00—French Prog.
6:00—Acropolis Bay
7:00—News in French
7:15—French Prog.
7:30—News Headlines
7:35—You Bet Your Life
8:00—Cinema, Cinema
8:30—Prison (Talk Show)
9:10—Sirens (Drama)
10:00—News At Ten
10:30—Film: The Substitute
12:00—Country Music

SUNDAY

3:00—Holy Koran
3:10—Pink Panther (Cart.)
3:30—Pumpkin Patch
3:30—The Adventures of the Black Stallion
4:00—American Chart Show
5:00—Royal Blood (Doc.)
6:00—French Program
7:00—News in French
7:15—French Programs
7:30—News Headlines
7:35—Life's Most Embarrassing Moments
8:00—People Count
8:30—Challenges
9:00—Renaissance (Drama)
10:00—News in English
10:30—Titanic (Mini Series, Part 1)
12:10—Hit of Rock & Roll

MONDAY

3:00—Holy Koran
3:10—Highlander (Cartoon)
3:30—The Gentle from Down Under (Drama)
4:00—Neighbours (Drama)
4:30—Last Frontiers (Doc.)
5:00—French Program
6:00—Sea Quest (Ep.1)



The X-Files (Drama), Friday at 10:30 pm.

7:00—News in French
7:15—French Program
7:30—News Headlines
7:35—Hope & Gloria
8:00—Perspective
8:30—What's your poison?
9:10—Good Guys, Bad Guys
10:00—News at Ten
10:30—Titanic (Part 2)

TUESDAY

3:00—Holy Koran
3:10—The Pink Panther
3:30—Small Talk (Quiz)
4:00—Neighbours
4:30—Life Choices (Doc.)
5:00—Royal Blood (Doc.)
6:00—French Program

7:00—News in French
7:15—French Program
7:30—News Headlines
7:35—Step by Step
8:00—What Would You Do?
8:30—Encounter
9:10—An Independent Man (Mini Series, Part 5)
10:00—News At Ten
10:30—Film: Do You Remember Love?

WEDNESDAY

3:00—Holy Koran
3:10—The Adventures of Teddy Ruxpin
3:30—Halfway Across The Galaxy & Turn Left



Amman cinemas

- Philadelphia I (Tel: 4634149): Deep Impact
- Philadelphia II (Tel: 4634149): The Man In The Iron Mask
- Galleria I (Tel: 079 33430): Godzilla
- Galleria II (Tel: 079 33430): City Of Angels
- Plaza (Tel: 5699238): Al Za'oon (Arabic)
- Concord I (Tel: 5677420): Deep Impact
- Concord II (Tel: 5677420): Ninja Turtles

4:00—The Album Show
5:00—French Program
6:15—Sea Quest (Ep.2)
7:00—News in French
7:15—French Program
7:30—News Headlines
7:35—Keeping Mum (Com.)
8:00—Envoy Special
8:30—Computer Chronicles
9:10—Kung-Fu
10:00—News at Ten
10:30—Chicago Hope
12:00—Bugs (Drama)

THURSDAY

3:00—Holy Koran
3:10—Animated Hero Classics (Cartoon)
3:30—Animal Park (Cartoon)
4:00—L'Ecole Des Fans
4:30—Blue Water Dreaming (Documentary)
5:00—NBA Games
6:15—Sliders
7:00—News in French
7:15—French Prog.
7:30—News Headlines
7:35—Family Matters (Com)
8:00—Great Romances of the 20th Century
8:30—Dr Quinn Medicine Woman (Drama)
9:10—Oprah Winfrey
10:00—News at Ten
10:30—Film: Trust Me
12:00—Can't Hurry Love

FRIDAY

3:00—Holy Koran
3:10—The Adventures of Teddy Ruxpin (Cart.)
3:30—The Borrowers
4:00—Film: Deadline
6:15—Les Cles De Fort Boyard (Quiz)
7:00—News in French
7:15—French Prog.
7:30—News Headlines
7:35—Fresh Prince of Bel Air

8:00—Life on the Digital Edge
8:30—Understanding Computing 9:10—Babylon 5
10:00—News at Ten
10:30—The X-Files (Drama)
12:00—Big Sky (Drama)

PROGRAMMES EN FRANÇAIS

SAMEDI
17:00—Faut pas rêver
19:00—Le Journal
19:15—Magazine L'œil de Colomb

DIMANCHE

18:00—Bonne espérance
19:00—Le Journal
19:15—E-M6

LUNDI

17:00—Thalassa
19:00—Le Journal
19:15—Magazine scientifique

MARDI

18:00—Les cœurs brûlés
19:00—Le Journal
19:15—Fractales

MERCREDI

17:00—Ushuaia
19:00—Le Journal
19:15—E-M6
20:00—Envoyé spécial

JEUDI

16:00—L'école des fans
19:00—Le Journal
19:15—Magazine L'œil de Colomb

VENDREDI

18:15—Fort Boyard
19:00—Le Journal
19:15—Allé la Terre

Programs are subject to change by JTV

FILM

HOODLUM

"Excellent Performance, Superb"

Oscar nominee Laurence Fishbone, Tim Roth and Andy Garcia set the screen ablaze in this revealing crime thriller, exploding with spectacular gun battles and brutal action. When the kings of the underworld wage all-out war on the city streets, it's mobster versus mobster in a blistering battle to the death.

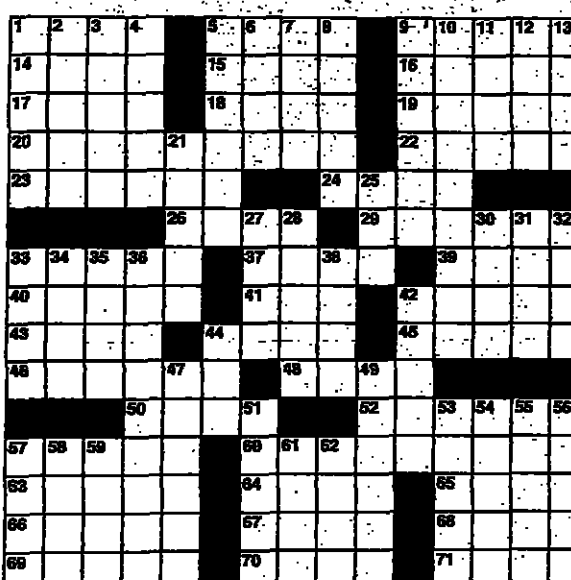
In 1930's New York, Bumpy Johnson (Fishbone) rules the Harlem numbers racket with a rare combination of honor, dignity and raw strength. But when savage gangster, Dutch Schultz (Roth), threatens his reign with a series of bloody attacks, Bumpy knows that the only way to win is to play Dutch's deadly game. As a vicious war spins madly out of control, so does Bumpy's personal life, and soon the mobster realizes that his only way out is to instigate a dangerous plan involving one of the most feared and powerful gangsters in history—mob chieftain Lucky Luciano (Garcia).

Pulsating with non-stop action and electrifying suspense, and featuring outstanding supporting performances by Vanessa Williams and the legendary Cicely Tyson, Hoodlum's a thrilling adventure, a classic gangster movie in all the best ways. (Pittsburgh Post Gazette).

VIDEO Al Rabieh near Garfields Restaurant
Tel: 079 98479 or 079 53280 (Mobile)

Original Audio & Video

CROSSWORD PUZZLE



- ACROSS**
1. Aesthetically pure
 2. Native one
 3. Very much
 4. High-spirited
 5. Wind instrument
 6. Conspicuous
 7. Ballet movement
 8. God of war
 9. Table mat
 10. Bell device
 11. Loosen
 12. "Where... is heard"
 13. Med
 14. Concord
 15. Bales exception
 16. Sticky substance
 17. Head away
 18. Words of understanding
 19. Source of creek
- DOWN**
1. Once... while
 2. Conflict in literature
 3. do focus
 4. Certain
 5. Elegiac verse
 6. Agreement
 7. Rapper or singer
 8. To
 9. Voice amplifier
 10. Organic compound
 11. Brewery product
 12. Eye problem
 13. Mello at the
 14. Leonine features
 15. Subtle niche
 16. Normalcy
 17. Anxious
 18. and heavily
 19. Sales phrase
- ACROSS**
20. Erudite
 21. Pretense
 22. Tactless
 23. Dull ways of speaking
 24. Ziti's love
 25. Glass, ice, and mixer
 26. Nautilus shell
 27. Most dreadful
 28. Virulent
 29. Big hit
 30. Across land
 31. Sharpens
 32. Boredom
 33. Benches
 34. Bristle
 35. Priest
 36. To... (unusually)
 37. Crazy
 38. Logan or
 39. Earth ad.

-This Week's-
HOROSCOPES

By Linda Black

Weekly Tip: The sun's in Virgo, which helps us all settle down to business. Virgo is very practical and hard working, very good with details.

Aries (March 21-April 19). Partnership matters come up. Settle the dispute, so you can get on to whatever comes next.

Taurus (April 20-May 20). You need to settle a dispute with another person. You need this person, for some reason, and he or she needs you.

Gemini (May 21-June 21). You fall in love again, maybe with the same old person. You work your fingers to the bone, hopefully not literally, but don't schedule anything else.

Cancer (June 22-July 22). Take care of household matters. Let your neighbors know what you need. One of them could provide it for you.

Leo (July 23-Aug. 22). A friend teaches you what you need to know. Let your friend know what that would be, so he or she can.

Virgo (Aug. 23-Sept. 22). The sun's in your sign now, and you have the distinct advantage. You'll need to have money in order to start your new projects.

Libra (Sept. 23-Oct. 23). You're looking good, but don't let it go to your head. You still have responsibilities demanding to be handled.

Scorpio (Oct. 24-Nov. 21). You're buried in paperwork. Don't argue. Just do it. You're awesome. You can make decisions quickly and the team wants to follow you.

Sagittarius (Nov. 22-Dec. 21). The sun in Virgo now means your life is going to be geared for success for the next 30 days.

Capricorn (Dec. 22-Jan. 19). Work interferes with your social life, but you can manage. Make contact with a foreigner and you might get to do something that you've always dreamed about.

Aquarius (Jan. 20-Feb. 18). Looks like more money going out than coming in. Send away for stuff you need to stretch your funds as far as possible.

Pisces (Feb. 19-March 20). A legacy pays off for you. Only draw on it if you really need the money, however. It might be enough just to know it's there.

If You're Having a Birthday This Week: Look deeply into yourself and you'll find the very person you always wished you could be. Your energy level is high this year, and you can focus it like a laser beam.

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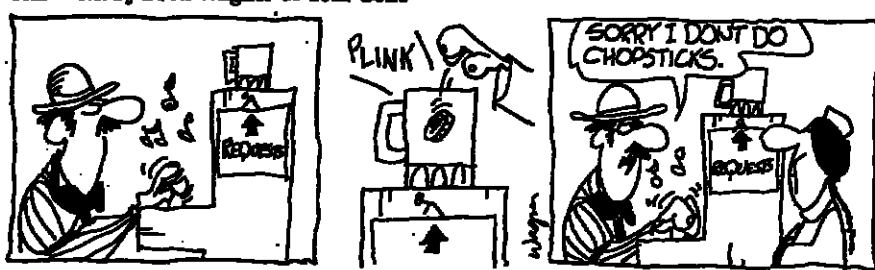
PERKY & BEANZ by Russell Myers



ELWOOD by Ben Tempelton & Tom Forman

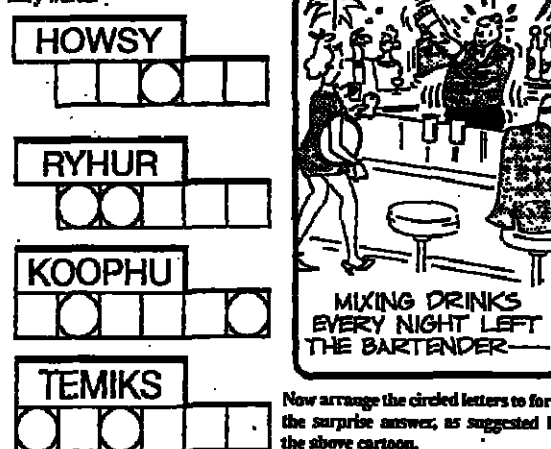


CATFISH by Fred Wagner & Tom Cone



Jumble

Unscramble these four words, one letter to each square, to form four ordinary words.



Print answer here: ALL

Answers: SHOWY HURRY HOOKUP KISMET

Words of Wisdom

Don't fret about growing old; many do not get that opportunity.

Even if you're on the right track, keep moving or you'll get run over.

Conscience may not prevent you from doing wrong, but it will keep you from enjoying it.

Knowing the weaknesses of others consoles our own feelings of inferiority.

Kindness costs nothing, but what it can buy is priceless.

If you distrust people, you always will find someone who will deceive you.



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The Star Stadium

Edited by Abdul Hamid Adgasi

Good preparations for the World Youth Championship in Turkey

Jordan's taekwondo teams beat Taiwan



HRH Crown Prince Hassan presents the trophy

Amman (Star)—On the occasion of His Majesty King Hussein's Accession to the Throne, the Jordan taekwondo teams—both boys and girls—scored a big win over their Taiwan counterparts. The matches took place at the Rashed Center for Self-Defence, and were attended by HRH Crown Prince Hassan, The Regent.

The boys' team won eight of their 10 matches, and was represented by: Mahmoud Otoum, Waleed Khalaf, Ahmad Abu Halawah, Jameel Alkhofash, Abdullah Abu Shihf, Firas Mhufza, Faris Alomari, Rashed Hekmat, Waleed Alkhateeb and Ayed Nabeel.

The girls' team won seven out of their 10 matches, and was represented by: Shatha Assaf, Rasha Msharbash, Zaha Altalhani, Alisar Matr, Ahlam Bino, Abeer Rabab'a, Alau Kutkut, Hana Sawalha, Laila Kutkut, and Sara Al Otayli.



Under 16's Football League

Al Hussein continue their winning streak

Amman (Star)—After scoring a surprising win over Al Wihdat (3-0) in the Jordanian league last week, Al Hussein went on to record another victory over their rivals this week. This time it was for the U-16 football league title.

The final match was held last Thursday at Al Petra stadium. Al Hussein won the game 3-1, with goals scored by Mohammed (2 goals) and Ahmad Al Batayneh (1 goal). Al Wihdat's only goal was scored by Samer Al Badayneh.

Although Al Hussein has never won the Jordanian men's league, the club keeps winning the youth competition, due to the great awareness of the club's directors.



National Basketball team prepares for a new challenge

By Abdul Hamid Adgasi
Special to The Star

JORDAN'S BASKETBALL team will be participating in the William Jones Championship, due to start in the Chinese city of Taipei this Monday. It pits together the nine best teams in Asia, along with a team from Costa Rica.

In preparation for the championship, the national team held a training camp in Greece, and played several games against clubs from the Greek 1st and 2nd Divisions. The team played six matches in all, winning two and losing the rest. The first two matches were

played without the presence of some key players, like Yousef Abu Bakr and Naser Alawneh. Despite the lack of success on the court, the training camp enabled coach Mourad Barakat to assess the performance of all the players, and to prepare his team tactics for the forthcoming tournament in Taipei.

The team that represented Jordan in Greece consisted of: Hilal Barakat, Yousef Zaglool, Ayman Da'as, Faisal Nsour, Fadi Al Saqa, Yousef Abu Bakr, Naser Alawneh, Ma'en Odeh, Ashraf Samarah, Hossam Lutfi, Jan Sahilyeh and Naser Bassam.

The Jordan Basketball Federation officials declined on Tuesday to name the final national team selection for the William Jones Championship, as they preferred to wait until after the two arranged matches against Iraq, here in Amman.

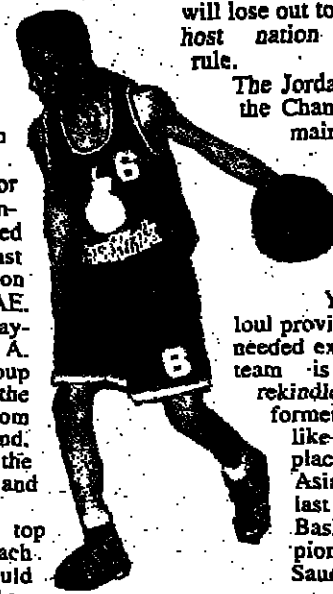
The draw for the Championship has pitted Jordan against the host nation China, UAE, Korea and Malaysia in group A. The other group includes the teams from Japan, Thailand, Saudi Arabia, the Philippines, and Costa Rica.

The two top teams in each group should qualify for the semi-finals (while the rest will play for 5th-10th places), but unfortunately for Jordan, the tournament regulations stipulate that the host team will automatically qualify for the

semi-finals, regardless of its results in the preliminary rounds. This means that Jordan can only guarantee a place in the semi-final by winning its group, because if the team comes second it will lose out to the automatic host nation qualification rule.

The Jordanian team for the Championship will mainly be made up of U-22 players, with veterans like Hilal Barakat and Yousef Zaglool providing the much needed experience. The team is hoping to rekindle some of its former glories, like its fourth place in the 1986 Asian Games. In last year's Asian Basketball Championship held in Saudi Arabia, the Kingdom finished in seventh position.

One thing is for sure, all of Jordan's basketball fans will be rooting for their national team in Chinese Taipei, and we at The Star wish the team the best of luck.



Fadi Al Saqa



Left: The National team



Yousef Zaglool



Naser Alawneh

Drug charge shouldn't affect case against Webber

By Josh Barr

WASHINGTON—Chris Webber's detention for possession of marijuana on Friday night in Puerto Rico will not affect the three misdemeanor charges—including possession of marijuana—the former Washington Wizards forward faces in Prince George's County, Md., according to Prince George's County state's attorney Jack Johnson.

Webber paid a \$500 fine and signed a statement admitting to possession of 11 grams of marijuana during a layover at Luis Munoz Marin International Airport near San Juan, a US Customs official said. Webber was among a group of 10 to 15 people traveling from the Dominican Republic to Barbados as part of a promotional tour sponsored by athletic wear manufacturer Fila.

A customs official said authorities in Prince George's, where Webber was arrested last January following a traffic stop, were notified of Webber's detention. However, Webber's detention

in Puerto Rico would influence proceedings in Prince George's only if Webber's case were to go to trial and result in a guilty verdict. Under those circumstances, Johnson said, Webber's detention Friday night might influence his sentencing. "The facts in our case are unique to Prince George's," Johnson said. "It could come into play at sentencing, but I don't know if the finding in Puerto Rico is a finding of guilt for Maryland purposes."

In Webber's latest trouble with the law, drug-sniffing dogs detected the scent of marijuana in a carry-on bag with American Airlines tags that identified the owner as Jerry Stackhouse, a Detroit Pistons guard who was part of the traveling group. After customs agents discovered the marijuana, Stackhouse denied ownership of the bag and Webber said it belonged to him.

Paul Kilcoyne, assistant special agent in charge of US Customs investigations in Puerto Rico, said agents posi-

tively identified the bag as Webber's and took Webber to another area of the airport for processing. The US attorney's office did not pursue criminal charges because the amount of marijuana was considered a "personal use" quantity, and Webber paid a \$500 administrative fine and signed a document stating that he entered Puerto Rico with the drugs, Kilcoyne said.

"He basically pays a \$500 fine, we retain the contraband and he's out the door," Kilcoyne said. "We did notify Prince George's County officials of the situation and they can do whatever they have to do."

In addition to his arrest in January, Webber and former Wizards teammate Juwan Howard were named by a Connecticut woman in a sexual assault complaint back in April. However, after a grand jury investigation, no charges were filed in that incident.

LA Times-Washington Post News Service



Football Roundup

Highlights from the French first division

Girondins Bordeaux (1) AJ Auxerre (0) Striker Sylvain Wiltord took his tally to four goals in three games by putting Bordeaux ahead after only four minutes. Right back David Jemmal crossed from the right, France striker Lilian Laslandes confused the defence with a clever dummy run and Wiltord volleyed the ball inside the near post. Bordeaux are second behind Marseille on goal difference.

Olympique Marseille (5) Montpellier (4) Marseille made a remarkable comeback after changing ends 4-0 down as striker Ibrahim Bakayoko punished lax defending with superb finishing. Montpellier scored their four goals in a spell of only 19 minutes but Marseille's first three came in only nine as substitute Christophe Dugary sparked an astonishing revival. Eric Roy hit the equaliser and Laurent Blanc struck the winner with an injury-time penalty.

Toulouse (0) Monaco (0) Top at the start of the day, Monaco's performance did not please coach Jean Tigana, who said: "For us it was a bad operation. I must review a lot of things if we have pretensions to play a leading role. All the other big players (Marseille, Bordeaux, Paris St Germain) won."

Lorient (0) Olympique Lyon (1) Playmaker Vikash Dhorasoo, signed from Le Havre, continued to impress for Lyon, laying on the only goal for Swiss striker Marco Grassi who timed his run to meet a perfect through-ball and beat the Lorient off-side trap early in the second half.

Strasbourg (0) Paris St Germain (1) Slovakia international goalkeeper Alexander Vencel made a string of fine saves to deny Marco Simone, Patrice Loko and Nigeria's Jay-Jay Okocha before little Italian striker Simone won the match with his second goal in two games after a break out of defence by Germany's Christian Woerns.

Reims (2) Le Havre (1) Le Havre went in front with a dubious penalty converted by Yugoslav Miladin Bec-



Marseille's tough approach paid dividends against Montpellier



Action from the game between Bayern Munich and MSV Duisburg

season. The 18-year-old signed a five-year deal during last season, but Liverpool has acted quickly to re-negotiate that contract to ward off interest in him from other clubs.

Owen's summing contribution to England's World Cup campaign, including the breathtaking solo goal he scored against Argentina, has rocketed him to world fame and led to reports of world-record transfer offers for the striker. "I had a clause in my last contract which said that I could re-negotiate when I had played for England in a competitive international," he said. "I have spoken to the board recently and am pleased to have extended my contract until 2002. As I have said all along, all I want to do is focus on my football and hopefully help bring more silverware back to Anfield."

The new deal will almost certainly have doubled his wages, which were reported to have been around 10,000 pounds (\$16,500) per week last season.

German first division (second week)

Title favourites Bayern Munich and champions Kaiserslautern delighted their fans with home wins in the German first division on Saturday to go joint top of the league.

Hansa Rostock (3) Wolfsburg (0) Nuremberg (3) Werder Bremen (2) Bayern Munich (3) MSV Duisburg (1) Kaiserslautern (2) B. M'gladbach (1) B. Dortmund (3) Hertha Berlin (0) Bayer Leverkusen (1) SC Freiburg (1) Hamburg (1) Bochum (0)

Spanish Cup Football

Mallorca pulled off a surprise Spanish Supercup victory over Barcelona on Saturday, taking the second leg 1-0 to complete a 3-1 aggregate win.

Barcelona started the game well; Brazilian striker Rivaldo twice going close with long-range efforts.

But Mallorca soaked up the early pressure and after 30 minutes managed to increase their 2-1 advantage from the first leg. A cross from the left was met by Dani, whose powerful header from 12 metres beat the diving Rued Hesp. Barcelona, looking increasingly tired, rarely threatened in the second half and Mallorca completed a well-deserved victory.

England: FA Premiership results (second week)

Unfashionable Charlton Athletic sit on top of the English premier league table on Saturday after thrashing Southampton 5-0 but Tottenham Hotspur are already in trouble after their second successive defeat.

Owen signs blockbuster deal with Liverpool

England World Cup star Michael Owen ended speculation about his future on Saturday by announcing that he has signed a five-year contract with Liverpool.

The deal was revealed ten minutes before the kickoff of Liverpool's Premiership match against defending champions Arsenal at Anfield when Owen was presented with the division's player-of-the-year trophy for last

THE STAR'S WORK COMPUTING & HIGH TECH

Edited by Zeid Nasser

Computer & IT companies!

Welcome to The Star's
Workstation, the absolute
source on what's hot and
what's not in
Jordan's IT market.
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with your news and views.

Parliament passes Intellectual Property Rights Law: Jordan set to crack down on Pirates!

By a Star Staff Writer
THE JORDANIAN parliament
has passed the Intellectual
Property Rights Law. This
means that the computer soft-
ware industry will be closely
monitored for any possible cop-
yright infringements.

It is expected that a special
committee or body would be
set up by the Government to
follow up on issues related to
copyright infringement in the
field of software. This is as
part of the Government's
intention to protect the invest-
ment of software owners and
prohibit the practice of illegal
copying.

This law should encourage
investors to bring their busi-
ness to Jordan, as they can rest
assured that their intellectual
property rights will be pro-
tected. This includes the com-
puter software, video, movie,
music and other industries; all
of which have not enjoyed the
same level of protection as in
the past.

There are many opportuni-
ties for Jordan's software
developers and professionals.
Huge international software
houses normally contract the
services of local developers. In
Third World countries like
India or China, on the one hand,
and because they receive lower
fees for 'coding'. So, as this
trend continues worldwide, Jordanian
software houses and
developers have been receiving
increasing offers in this regard.
In most cases, though, talks

fell through because of the lack
of proper enforcement of intel-
lectual property rights.

There were fears that, once
the 'code' was received by a
software house in Amman, it
could claim its ownership or
operation, but quite 'patriotic'!

What does all this mean to
the software shops, that sell il-
legal copies? They will have to
end their illegal copying opera-
tions, or face the threat that any
person or governmental body
may sue their shops, and eas-
ily win the case in Amman's
courts which will most defini-
tely declare their activities as
illegal!

What's more, any major or
medium size company using
illegally obtained software,
could face a lawsuit, which
will probably result in them
being forced to purchase soft-
ware licenses, to correct their
'copyright infringement'.

These companies are at
risk, because they are targeted
by major software suppliers,
who are sick and tired of
being unable to sell their prod-
ucts to them due to software
piracy.

A point to be made here is
that a cooperative group effort
is required to make the
transformation.

People need to understand
what intellectual property rights
is all about, and why they
should observe the law. Rather
than a confrontational
approach, governmental or
semi-governmental bodies
should be advised to adopt a
'consultative' approach to allow
a 'grace period'.
This period is absolutely nec-
essary to ensure that companies
and businesses can sort their
software situation straight.
The software industry is

going to be the easiest to trans-
form. The real problems lie in
closing down all the video and
music shops around the coun-
try, which sell illegal software.
Also, on a much larger econ-
omic scale, the patent proce-
dure in the pharmaceutical
industry will turn this vital econ-
omic sector upside down!

If properly implemented,
intellectual property rights laws
will affect the lives of most of
us.

Through greater understand-
ing and a reasonable pace of
application, the end result will
be beneficial for Jordan.

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us.

Greater demand for Middle East IT professionals

THE MIDDLE East will con-
tinue to face a severe shortage
of IT professionals for the fore-
seeable future.

According to experts,
despite the fairly advanced
stage of the technological envi-
ronment in the Middle East
which attracts a fair share of
professional IT people, there
will always be a proportion of
people with 'doubtful' skills.

Over the past decade, IT has
become the core component of
many businesses from its humble
beginnings as a facilitator.
Qualified professionals are in
demand in any field of busi-
ness, but the already huge sup-
ply/demand gap for IT profes-
sionals is rapidly growing.

Greater regional and interna-
tional exposure to the tech-
nological opportunities on offer in
the Middle East is needed to
encourage IT professionals to
settle in the region and stabilize
the supply/demand situation.

Ravishanker, Business
Development Manager of IT
People Dubai, a leading Dubai-
based organization specializing
in the recruitment of IT profes-
sionals at all levels, commented
by saying that, "there is a huge

demand supply gap for an IT
Professional. This is not a new
phenomenon. IT professionals
have always been in great
demand because there were so
few of them, but as their tribe
increased so did the computers
proliferate, and 'voila' the situ-
ation was worse than ever."

Describing the situation
worldwide, Ravishanker
stresses the huge shortage of
candidates with the right qual-
ifications. Candidates with
doubtful skills can always be
found readily available locally,
but the drain on resources for
screening and short-listing of
such candidates increases.

In the United States alone it
is estimated that there is a
shortage of 140,000 software
professionals just to address the
millennium bug alone. Figures
show that less than 40 per cent
of corporations are going to
successfully address the mil-
lennium dilemma in time, a situ-
ation many other countries must
also face. However, according
to experts, it is still the United
States that many IT profes-
sionals target when looking for
settled employment. The tech-
nological developments in the US

and the potential for promotion
and advancement have for
many years been serious entice-
ments for ambitious IT
Professionals.

This continued predilection
of candidates to emigrate to the
West (mainly the United States)
is among many concerns facing
employers searching for the
right IT Professional. The
increased role of regionally
developed Arabic software
applications will inevitably lead
to an increase in the Arabisa-
tion of the work force but with
the millennium and Euro issues
looming, the supply/demand situ-
ation is unlikely to ease in the
short to medium term.

However, as the technology
gap continues to reduce and the
economy stabilizes, the Gulf is
fast becoming a first choice for
many professionals especially
from the Subcontinent (India,
Pakistan etc) and with many
Western expatriates, keen to
avoid the worst of the reces-
sion.

Source: Dubai World Trade
Centre LLC

News update

The Pope in cyberspace!

● Pope John Paul made a
grand entry into the Internet
world, as the Vatican
announced that the pope's
speeches will be broadcast live
on the Internet.

Surfers can go to address:
www.vatican.va. Roman Cath-
olics will hear and see the Pope
recite prayers and conduct Vati-
can ceremonies.

Interestingly, the three host
computers used are named after
angels the Raphael, Michael
and Gabriel. Reports state that

'Raphael' stores graphics and
navigation paths, while
'Michael' protects the site from
intruders and 'Gabriel' inter-
faces between the other two
computers and the world. As of
yet, the Pope doesn't have a
email address. It looks like the
Vatican intends to keep it that
way!

Sinbad from Sakhr

● Sakhr Software had the
option to start from scratch and
develop a fully Arabic browser,
or to Arabise one of the popu-
lar English browsers. The sec-
ond option was taken and Net-
scape Navigator has become
Sindbad Netscape.

Sindbad works under the
Arabic and Latin versions of
Windows 95. The easy-to-
install program features Sakhr
Internet Software which
includes both Sindbad Net-
scape 3.0 and Internet Writer,
which is separately installed.

Under the Arabic version of
Windows 95, Sindbad's inter-
face carries both Arabic and
English text. ■

To late to solve Y2K?

GARMINER GROUP announced that it may be too late to
solve the all Year 2000-related computer troubles world-
wide, especially with under 500 days remaining to the
unavoidable deadline: midnight, 31/12/1999.
"It is estimated that a large percentage of companies
worldwide have not even started to solve their Year 2000
problem. This results could be losses of billions of dollars,
and to both multinationals and to covering the costs of com-
puting in some parts of the world, the situation looks
grim indeed. The Middle East, South Asia and Africa are
at least 12 months behind North America and Europe in
addressing the problem. The millennium computer bomb is
a legacy from shortsighted by software writers, who in the
name of economy expressed years with just the final two
digits rather than four. ■

INTERFACE

BY ZEID NASSER

The brand suppliers are 'bullish' about hitting back: Pushing out the assemblers!

ASSEMBLED PCs have become so common in Jordan, and
are said to account for over half the market in the country.
This has prompted major PC suppliers to take action, and
what an action it is.

According to 'inside sources', there is a consensus among
the big companies who carry the prestigious PC brands, to
'push out the assemblers'. How, you may wonder?

Well, what is the only
way to beat the assem-
blers at their own game?
Of course, the price is
the answer.

By continuously
ensuring that major
brand PCs fall in price,
within a 'reasonable'
range of around JD 100
from a typical assembled
PC, it can be expected
that most buyers would be willing to pay that little extra to
ensure the quality of a respectable American or Taiwanese
brand.

In figures, this means that you should be able to purchase a
full multimedia, Pentium system with modern Compaq
for as little as JD 900. That is around JD 100 - JD 150 more
than a typical assembled PC. For most buyers, especially
small and medium sized businesses and organizations there is
no question about their preference. Surely, it would be the
Compaq.

The fact that prices are falling on the international market,
and that more brand manufacturers are employing cost
cutting technologies in production, contribute to the trend of
lower priced brand PCs in markets all over the world, includ-
ing Jordan.

Around six months ago, in the United States, well-known
brands dipped below the \$1,000 limit. That is around JD 700.
Add some shipping charges to that and you should get the
current price of brand PCs in Amman, and that's not taking
customs tax into consideration. The simple fact that a major
PC manufacturer has set up a Middle East office means that
they are better able to monitor our markets and provide better
product pricing, speed of delivery and support services.

So, should assembled PC suppliers be scrambling to pro-
tect themselves from the onslaught of brand resellers? Actu-
ally, I doubt it. The whole idea is that assembled PC suppliers
want to offer buyers a low priced PC system. If the Compaq,
HP or IBM dealer can give them something reasonably
priced to sell to their customers, then there shouldn't be a
problem.

As a matter of fact, a number of well-known assembled PC
suppliers I talked to have already taken on the sales of pre-
stigious brands like Compaq and HP. These people can see
the way ahead, and understand that customers like you and
me will be asking for brand PCs soon.

The whole concept of lower priced brand PCs, driving out
the assembled systems is revolutionary. It could completely
change the face of the computer market locally and
regionally.

Only then, will pride of ownership and brand loyalty return
to the PC industry, reminding us all of the past—in the mid-
eighties—when an IBM PC was really an IBM, and when the
cloners were the top companies in the world. ■

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Warning: Bassett's 'Stella' is a fire hazard

By Gene Seymour

IF THE intent of most summer movies is to rouse oohs, aahs and various other sound effects from their audiences, then "How Stella Got Her Groove Back" more than fulfills its mandate.

Nothing blows-up—not literally, anyway—in this adaptation of Terry McMillan's best-selling novel about a 40-year-old black stockbroker and single mom (Angela Bassett) who travels to Jamaica on a whim and finds passionate love in the form of a 20-year-old islander, Winston (newcomer Taye Diggs).

But there's plenty of fire and heat generated by some of the more torrid love scenes to be found in any commercial Hollywood film. The lush, steamy eroticism between Bassett's Older Woman and Diggs' Younger Man is the contemporary equivalent of old-fashioned, rip-snorting bodice-ripping romance, and during one advance screening, it made half a row of 40-ish black women go "OooOoooh. Whoa, and maybe just once in a while, Hmmm."

One of those "hmmms" was accompanied by a curt whisper aimed toward Bassett's character. "And she's married in real life? What is her husband going to think?"

A couple of days after this screening, Bassett laughs with gentle recognition when informed of such concern. She's heard second and third-hand accounts of similar squirming on her husband's behalf at other previews of "Stella," leading to its nationwide premiere Friday. Don't these people know she's married to an actor? Don't they know that the actor in question, Courtney Vance, had done his own share of onscreen lovemaking? Don't they know that it's—for heavens sake—only a movie?

But since it has been brought up, what does Vance think? Bassett laughs again. "It's funny to him," she says. "It tickles him. His comment usually is, 'She's a great actress!'"

No argument there. Bassett's work has earned her such accolades as "riveting" and "extraordinary" from those who have seen her performances onstage (Ma Rainey's Black Bottom, Joe Turner's Come and Gone, the recent New York Public Theater production of Macbeth), on TV (The Jacksons: An American Dream) and on the big screen (What's Love Got to Do With It, as Betty Shabazz in Malcolm X, and in Waiting to Exhale). Indeed, producer Kenneth "Babyface" Edmonds said last month that Hollywood regards Bassett and Whitney Houston as

the only first-choice, bankable black actresses.

"Stella," however, is something of a milestone for Bassett in that she is the movie's undisputed star. Even with her bravura turn as rock icon Tina Turner in "What's Love Got to Do With It," she shared attention—and Oscar nomina-

presence. She runs the kind of emotional gauntlet that such great Hollywood stars as Katharine Hepburn, Bette Davis and Barbara Stanwyck did.

"I can't say enough about Angela," says Deborah Schindler, who produced both "Exhale" and "Stella." "I have seen her under the most extraordinary circumstances when shooting is delayed way past dark, or

McMillan began writing the book at around the time that "Exhale" was released three years ago. Though fiction, "Stella" captures what its author has called the essence of a real-life experience she had when, after the deaths of her mother and her best friend in one year, she decided to take a trip to Jamaica, where she fell in love with a man who was 20 years younger than she was.

"I'm not sure how the sequence of events went," Bassett says, "but I remember meeting (McMillan's) young man shortly before or shortly after 'Exhale' came out."

Was she happy to take the part? Please! The major role in a follow-up to a box-office smash? And a few weeks of shooting in Jamaica? What's not to like?

Asked what the most arduous part of the filmmaking process was, the worst thing Bassett mentions is an unexpected storm that forced one scene originally intended as a twilight beach stroll to be shot indoors. Oh yes, there also was what she remembers as a nightly cacophony of tree frogs. That was annoying. But still several leagues above worst.

The best part? Bassett is challenged to isolate one high point. Working with Goldberg will suffice. The interplay between their characters is natural and unaffected enough to make one believe it was all improvised. Some of it was. In one instance, director Kevin Rodney Sullivan encouraged both actresses to improvise a hospital sequence.

"And she was a little sick that day," Bassett says of Goldberg. "You couldn't tell from looking at her, but she wasn't feeling good. Kevin got us to rehearse what we were going to say. But by the time we were rolling through all this stuff about high school dates and memories, Kevin said, 'Stop! Let's just get it on camera!'"

During one pillow-talk sequence between Stella and Winston, she tells him about growing up in a housing project and being encouraged to chase her dreams. One hears Bassett's own voice speaking through her character. She, too, grew up in a project (in St. Petersburg, Fla.), and she was also urged to keep her grades up, maintain her focus, stay true to her calling—which, after a class trip to Washington, DC, to see James Earl Jones in "Of Mice and Men," became acting.

"Who knows?" Bassett says. It might have turned out exactly the same way for her as it did for Stella, who traded her original dream of making furniture for major-league finance. "While a Yale University undergraduate, I did think that I should perhaps be more practical about my career and go to business school," says Bassett, who holds two



Angela Bassett, star of "How Stella Got Her Groove Back": "I have come to understand that I possess a strength that people can feel and appreciate, a strength and sensitivity, as opposed to a kinetic flair."

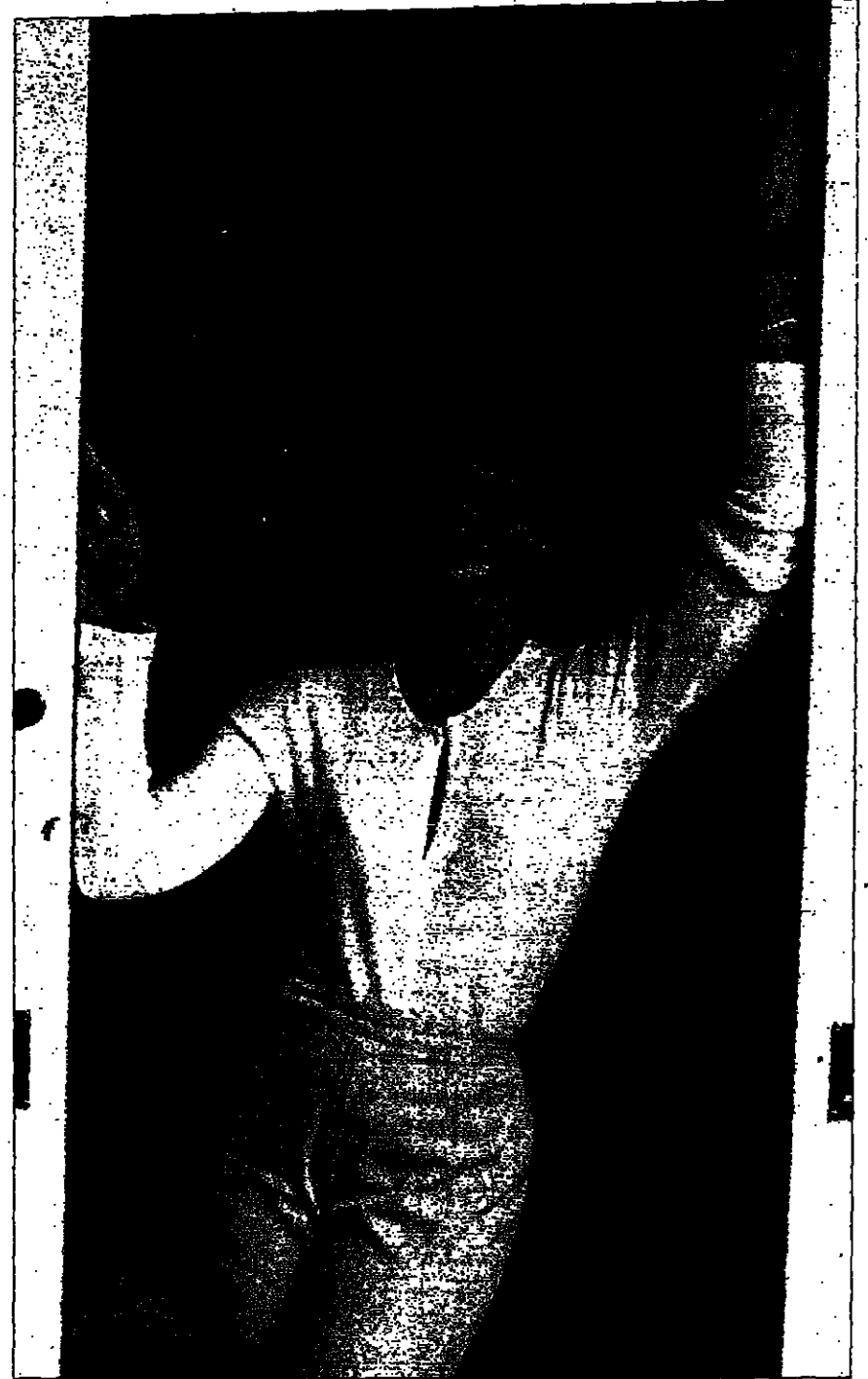
LA Times Photo

conditions are awful and everything just drags. And not only is she prepared—always—she will do five, six takes, and, without being told, she'll deliver something different in each one. She gives you options. And with some of such range, she not only gives you options. She gives you the full spectrum of emotions, sometimes in just one frame."

Schindler says she and McMillan, the movie's co-executive producer and co-screenwriter, agreed before the book was published in 1996 that Bassett (who turns 40 this year) was the only one who could play Stella. It is also a romantic

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Actress Angela Bassett sizzles in "How Stella Got Her Groove Back."

LA Times Photo

Yale degrees, a bachelor's in Afro-American studies and a master's from the drama school. "But that thought lasted for maybe about a year. And it was in my junior year that I decided to give it a shot, to give my dreams a shot."

To say things turned out OK would be understating matters severely. She moved swiftly from Yale productions into Broadway roles, and has now achieved such status among Hollywood actors that she no longer has to audition for roles, even relatively minor ones like that of the presidential aide in last year's "Contact."

"Contact" also gave her something to do while waiting for "Stella" to be developed and written. Playing Lady Macbeth last winter to Alec Baldwin's Macbeth also filled time between movie projects, but it meant much more to her: "I hadn't been back to the stage in so long. I missed that intimate contact with a live audience, the way you get into the emotion of a character. In movies you're doing small moments again and again and again, building a scene. But there's something about the passion you bring to

the stage, the way you have to be bigger on the stage and reach all the way to the back of the theater, and I could pull it back and shape it and do whatever I want with it."

Still, for all of her consummate stagecraft, Bassett has become one of the best at letting her face project conflicting emotions in front of a camera. One keeps going back to that riveting sequence in "Exhale" in which her character, Bernadine, in silent, agonizing rage, responds to her abandonment by jamming the entire contents of her husband's wardrobe closet into his BMW and setting the whole thing ablaze.

"I tend to be self-conscious about the camera, so I do my best to forget it's there," Bassett says. Referring to that scene, she says she had abandoned herself to her character's emotions to the point where she could say, "Oh the cameras are on? Well, I don't CARE!" And then she laughs the way she never would if she were in character. ■

LA Times-washington Post News Service



Actress Salmá Hayek and boyfriend Edward Atterton arrive for the premiere of the new film "S4," at Mann's Chinese Theater in Hollywood. Hayek portrays "Anita," the coat check-in girl in the film about the famous New York City disco nightclub during the 1970's. The film which also stars Myers, Ryan Phillippe, and Neve Campbell and opens in the United States 28 August.

Reuters

Australian Wedge-tailed Eagle



An endangered Australian Wedge-tailed Eagle holds a rat in its beak at the Bundamba Wildlife Sanctuary in Townsville 20 August. The bird was brought to the sanctuary after being found on a road suffering from a broken wing and as a result, has become completely dependent on means of obtaining food.